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# Who owns ethnography? : the practitioners of contemporary business ethnography

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What would you like to be said about you at your eulogy?

We're almost done. Only a couple more questions.

Wrap up

Do you work with interns?

Is there anything I didn't ask you that you'd like to add?

WHO OWNS ETHNOGRAPHY?:  
THE PRACTITIONERS OF CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS ETHNOGRAPHY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology  
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Mary Honodel McCuiston

December 2008

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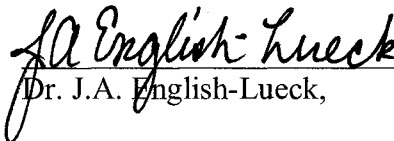
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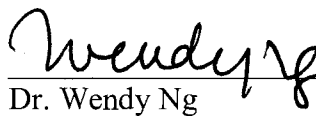
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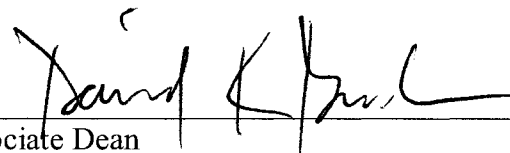
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## ABSTRACT

### WHO OWNS ETHNOGRAPHY?:

### THE PRACTITIONERS OF CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS ETHNOGRAPHY

by Mary Honodel McCuiston

This project is a study of qualitative researchers who practice what is known as “ethnography” within industry and business. Although it has been considered a deliverable within anthropology, it has been increasingly adopted by anthropologists and researchers from other fields as an investigative process. In this incarnation, “ethnography” primarily involves *in situ* interviewing and participant observation. Anthropologists have made the case that since the quality of the product depends on the background and training of the researcher, practitioners who have no theoretical grounding hurt the profession. Employers are left with little information about what ethnography is and what it can offer. The study is composed of data from participant observations from two companies employing ethnographers and anthropologists on their research staff, work done as a principal investigator for another firm, sixteen interviews with practitioners, four interviews with employers, and mining an online practitioner group. Much of the tension can be traced to a lack of definitions and metrics. Since it is unclear what ethnography is and what ethnographers do, until practitioners reach a consensus about praxis, it will be impossible to create standards that might help define who can and cannot be considered an ethnographer.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The research company with which I am interning has arranged a focus group. It serves two purposes – to gather information about people’s daily management of their health issues and to find participants with whom we can conduct more in-depth interviews. I have been invited, along with other members of the team, including other interns, to watch the session. It is the first time I have ever seen a focus group in action and I am excited to see what happens. We have a comfortable room adjacent to the focus group’s filled with snacks of the type that most of our participants should avoid like the plague. One side of our room is a wall of glass that corresponds to the two-way wall of the group’s room. It is time to start. We shut off the lights of our room and the participants shuffle in. Light from the group’s room filters through the glass and we can see to take notes. We must be quiet so we don’t disturb the session. Our group tonight is comprised of individuals who have been managing the effects of diabetes. It is a mostly male group; all members are middle-aged or older and most are white. The focus group leaders for tonight are a female Ph.D. anthropologist (Lorraine) and her colleague, a male M.A. ethnographer (Luis). As the questions begin and the participants start to relax and open up, I realize that Lorraine is consistently asking question that lead to deeper consideration by the group’s members: “When you have an insulin event, how does that affect the way you think about your future?” Luis is more focused on the day-to-day functioning of the individuals: “Do you carry your insulin with you everywhere or do you have stashes of it in the places you frequently go?” Although both are getting useful information, it is clear they are operating from different scripts and getting different levels of data.

This project is a study of qualitative researchers who practice what is known as “ethnography” within industry and business. Although within the bounds of anthropology it has been considered a deliverable, it has developed an additional meaning and has been adopted by both anthropologists and other researchers as an investigative process. The other researchers have various backgrounds, from marketing to design to engineering. In this incarnation, “ethnography” primarily involves, among other

techniques, *in situ* interviewing and participant observation. The goal of the research is to study a target population, uncovering previous unknown or exploring existing information that could not be found using methods such as surveys, focus groups, *et cetera*. However, in published comments (McCracken 2006b), online discussions (Anthrodesign 2006), and personal conversations, who is qualified to work as and call themselves ethnographers has been the source of concern. The quality of work of some “ethnographers” has been questioned. Often, it reduces to an argument over the training and background of the researcher.

The study investigates whether there is a difference in the way that anthropologists and practitioners trained in other disciplines designed, executed, and evaluated projects using “ethnography.” To that end, this thesis combines the study of business anthropology with a confidential qualitative investigation of business ethnographers. In addition to reading published ethnographies of researchers working in business settings, I spent time with researchers using ethnographic methods and their employers, working with and interviewing them, as well as functioning as an ethnographer myself.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions fall into five areas. The first involves defining ethnography in context of the domain of this study. How does that differ from its traditional/etymological meaning in the domain of anthropologists?

Second, the role of education/training/background of the researcher is considered. For that purpose, I look at how the research is carried out by a non-anthropologist

ethnographer compared to someone with a master's or doctoral degree in anthropology. I also question the role level of education plays. What are the distinctions in work practices and outcomes between researchers with differing levels of academic achievement? How does extensive, formal academic training produce distinctions in work practices and outcome? Another important question is what sort of difference does it make which discipline produced the "ethnographer." How does training in a specific discipline affect praxis? Finally, how does the researcher's training in the use of ethnographic methodology affect her work? What differences exist between those formally trained in a classroom versus those trained in the field?

The next question involves determining other differences in practice. What does the practitioner bring to actual work practices? What is his or her skill set? How does she or he view his or her role and function? What are the differences in the value added based on the background of the practitioner?

A fourth area of inquiry examines the role of theory in praxis. How does theory come into play in the design and implementation of research? How does theory influence the deliverable and the policy or decisions that result from their findings? Where is theory employed? What is the process through which a theoretical framework is chosen? How much fluidity is involved? How do practitioners negotiate theory with the needs and proclivities of the client/employer? How do they communicate/translate findings to the employer?

Finally, it is important to look at employer perceptions of researchers. How do the employers understand ethnography? What do they think they are getting for their

money? How much does the researcher's background matter to employers? Can they distinguish between the findings of an anthropologist and a non-anthropologist researcher? How do employers assess the quality and the value of the deliverable from the varying types of researchers?

### **Definition of Ethnography**

To a large extent, what anthropologists and ethnographers do and who they are is not well defined within the business community. In fact, ethnography was one of the occupations included in a book on odd jobs (Schiff 2006). Sociologist Hy Mariampolski and his wife, Sharon Wolf, of QualiData Research Inc. were included as part of the book on people's unusual careers. The author described how Mariampolski and Wolf observed people in their homes doing mundane tasks such as killing insects, cleaning bathrooms, or doing their laundry.

Ethnography, whether or not it was identified as such, has been a practice since the time of Herodotus (Thomas 2000). In the colonial days of anthropology, administrators, missionaries, and travelers would use what we now think of as ethnographic methods (Baba 2005): carefully watching people in their natural surroundings, attempting to share in their experience, and understanding their point of view while maintaining an outsider's perspective. As the practice evolved and was formalized through the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, the captured knowledge was analyzed and communicated through a product known as an ethnography.

The classical understanding of ethnography is rooted in its etymology – the Greek words *ethnos* and *graphein*, creating a word meaning the writing of culture. Barthes

asserted that ethnographies were the mortar holding culture and fieldwork together; they acted to unravel the subject culture and reweave it for the target culture (1972). Well-known ethnographies include those by Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, (1922); E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (1951); James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (1896), Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People* (1962); and perhaps the most popular ethnography of all time, Margaret Meads' *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928).

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider the effects of postmodernism on ethnography and anthropology, let it be enough to say that ethnography as a product has also evolved, resulting in the questioning of whose voice, whose vision, and which truth should be privileged in the ethnographic work (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Current ethnographies reflecting this increased reflectivity and reflexivity include *Writing Women's Worlds: Beduin Stories*, Lila Abu-Lughod (1993); Diane E. Forsythe's *Studying Those Who Study Us: An Anthropologist in the World of Artificial Intelligence* (2001); and *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992). These books explicitly situate the author in relationship to the subject about which they write.

Ethnography continues to evolve as its definition sheds its origins as a deliverable, even among anthropologists. Sidney Mintz declared "... ethnography was a professional activity that first grew out of observations of the sort that human beings have doubtless been making about each other since the beginnings of society" (2000:170). He credited anthropology with formalizing the principles, both practical and ethical.

However, he went on to suggest that ethnography is a *method* which could be extracted from anthropology. He did not suggest it should be uncoupled, but that it had been used independent of anthropological training since before it was recognized as a methodology. Even the American Anthropological Association seems to recognize that ethnography is no longer just a product. “Ethnography is the primary method used by these researchers of consumer-related behavior to investigate human social phenomena and create descriptions that document behavior and social experiences” (American Anthropological Association 2006). Other anthropologists working in this area agree. Tony Salvador, Human Factors Design Engineer, along with Genevieve Bell and Ken Anderson, anthropologists with Intel’s People and Practices Group said, “Ethnography, broadly defined, is a methodology used to represent the perspective of everyday life” (Salvador, Bell, and Anderson 1999:36).

This conceptualization by anthropologists, set within the context of a business setting, is similar but not the same as one held by others practicing ethnography. Cheskin (2008), a San Francisco Bay Area innovation firm, published “An Ethnography Primer.” In this small, red booklet, ethnography is defined as *in situ* observations. Blythin, Rouncefield, and Hughes state ethnography’s purpose is to perform “detailed observation of activities within their natural setting” (1997:40). They saw its goal as chronicling the events that occur during some type of task, giving attention to helps and hindrances. Indeed, observations in a naturalistic setting seem to be the criterion most ethnographers identified as describing the practice of ethnography (Reese 2002).



However, not all anthropologists are ready to abandon the battle to maintain ethnography's traditional meaning. Wasson (2002) argued that ethnography was a creative process and was about uncovering patterns within a culture and developing explanatory models. She went so far as to say that it involved extensive training, archetypically requiring a doctoral degree. In discussing the more recent use of the term she said, "In its most emaciated form, the term is simply used to refer to a designer with a video camera. Even in somewhat richer versions, the term has become closely identified with the act of *observing* naturally occurring consumer behaviors. The need to *analyze* those behaviors and situate them in their cultural context is poorly understood, even though these activities are essential parts of developing a model of user experience that leads to targeted and far-reaching design solutions" (2002:87).

Though anthropologists may concede that ethnography is no longer just a product, they still feel that it is made up of more than observations outside a lab. Wasson echoed Marcus and Fisher (1986) as she described it (based on Agar (1980) and van Maanen's (1988) discussions): "For anthropologists, 'ethnography' is a complex process that encompasses fieldwork (usually entailing immersion in some culture for a year or more), interpretations of the phenomena observed, and the articulations of these insights in textual form" (2002:87). In addition, it is holistic and involves a theoretical perspective (Blomberg, Burrell, and Guest 2003; Stewart 1998).

Not only anthropologists see ethnography as a complex endeavor. Sociologist Hy Mariampolski also saw the contemporary business practice of ethnography as being composed of theory and method. "Ethnography can be taken as a theoretical perspective

that focuses on the concept of culture and its relation to behavior as the principal analytic tool for classifying and explaining consumer dynamics” (2006:6). Methodologically, he describes the practice as “direct engagement with the ‘real world’” (2002:7), contrasted with research done in laboratories and other artificially constructed environments, telephone surveys, or shoppers’ interviews.

Further complicating attempts to arrive at a consensus definition is the contextual-dependent etymology of the word. The answer seems to depend on not only who is asked, but also in what situation they are queried. Salvador, Bell, and Anderson explained, “Design ethnography is a way of understanding the particulars of daily life in such a way as to increase the success probability of a new product or service or, more appropriately, to reduce the probability of failure specifically due to a lack of understanding of the basic behaviors and frameworks of consumers” (1999:37). However, ethnographic methods are not a static toolkit: “Ethnographic design methods change depending on the question or problem and the country or region. Not all studies require the same set of methods and practices; indeed, not all studies require the same intensity.” In their experience, the praxis of ethnography must remain flexible to be successful. “In fact, you must experiment if you are to get at the issues relevant to your particular company or client” (Salvador, Bell, and Anderson 1999:41).

For the duration of this thesis, the word “ethnography” will be defined as the application of ethnographic methods (on-site investigations: interviews, participant observation, simple observation, as well as other, ad hoc methods) to discern answers to questions ranging from “How do I get my customer to buy X?” to “How can we integrate

a new software system into existing practices?” to “What are the ways this team functions as to promote or inhibit the creation of X?” and the attendant analysis required to provide an employer with the answer to those questions, even if in a form that the employer did not anticipate. It may or may not be accompanied by a theoretical framework. Even within this report, it varied depending on the researcher. “Ethnographer” will refer to those practicing “ethnography” with or without formal background and advanced degree in anthropology. “An ethnography” will refer to the published account of the ethnographer’s fieldwork.

### **Defining Participants**

Confounding the topic of this thesis is that not only is the practice of ethnography ill defined, but those who practice it can be found under a number of titles. Turning to the anthropologists’ side of the aisle, explaining the nomenclature used by and for the anthropologists involved in this type of work can be daunting. On the one hand, business or corporate anthropology can be an umbrella term embracing multiple functions performed by anthropologists in a business, corporate, or industrial setting and on the other, may delineate a specific function within an organization. The practitioner may be an employee or a consultant. Other titles the researcher may use include industrial, organizational, or design anthropology.

Marietta Baba delineated the different ways of naming the work as follows:

“Business and industry are fundamental ways of organizing economic activity to meet basic human needs in modern market societies. *Business* means the buying and selling of goods and services in the marketplace (also known as commerce or trade), while *industry*

refers to the organized production of goods and services on a large scale. When we use these terms in the anthropological context (for example, business or industrial anthropology), we may refer to one or more of the three major domains of anthropological research and practice in the private sector 1) anthropology related to the process of producing goods and services, and to the corporate organizations in which production takes place; 2) ethnographically-informed design of new products, services, and systems for consumers and businesses, and/or 3) anthropology related to the behavior of consumers and the marketplace” (2006:83).

Describing the differences between business/corporate (specific form), organizational, industrial and design anthropology can be done by looking at their respective roles in a business, for demonstrative purposes, a fictional corporation, X-Products, Inc., a manufacturer of mp3 players. The CEO of the organization would work with a business anthropologist to help understand her consumers as people, their needs, wants, beliefs, and behaviors, and to define her market, which would lead to the design of a business plan and long-term strategies. An organizational anthropologist would be employed to look at the inner workings, the culture, of X-Products itself, to help it run more efficiently; solve employee-management problems; or to understand the often powerful, unseen, informal power structure. Industrial anthropologists would be found on the production floor, studying the people and processes that occur in producing product. A design anthropologist would work with designers, collecting data *in situ* about peoples’ thoughts, habits, and behaviors as they relate, however seemingly tangential, to the product.

For both anthropologists and practitioners from other backgrounds and disciplines, they may work under the title of consultant, designer, market researcher, user researcher, as well as numerous other classifications. No one does ethnography full time and in only a few cases is their title simply ethnographer.

### **Purpose**

The intent of this thesis is not to determine who has the right to practice the science/art of what is currently known as ethnography, but to explore the ambiguities of the praxis and the differences and similarities of the practitioners as well as the relationship between the differing types of practitioners. Ultimately, because this praxis takes place in a business environment and business in this country is primarily profit-driven, the question of who can produce what value must be addressed.

However, the results of this study have implications for the training of those who would wish to do this type of work. If ethnographers produce the same product and achieve the same level of employer satisfaction as an anthropologist holding a doctoral degree, then in the context of this praxis, there is no reason to obtain the additional years of education. If on-the-job training proves as effective as months of offshore fieldwork (OSF), the need for traditional anthropological Ph.D. pedagogy for those who wish to work in business settings would need to be questioned. As a consequence of this research, the lines between who is considered an anthropologist and what it means to be an anthropologist may require redefinition. If it is found that those without training are delivering an unsatisfactory product, then in the interest of preserving the credibility of all researchers, an effort must be initiated to either provide education for practitioners

lacking necessary characteristics or establishing credentialing to separate the qualified from the incompetent.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The data for this study were obtained in three ways: practitioner interviews, participant observation of practitioners, and examining the post of a researchers' online community. It also involved reading published and private reports by both participating practitioners and other researchers. Most data sections of the paper were laid out to maximize comparative efforts. In some subsections, data is separated by degree and field; in others, only by degree; in still others, by field. There was little attempt at consistency of format for these subchapters, but much effort was put into organizing the material in a way that made sense.

Chapter two describes the participants, the methods employed in obtaining data, and conducting the analysis. Chapter three contains the background and history of business anthropology as well as an attempt to delineate the extent to which ethnography is practiced, and a discussion of how practitioners came to practice ethnography. In Chapter four, the factors attracting researchers to the use of ethnographic methods are explored.

Chapter five is a discussion of the relationship between academic and non-academic anthropologists, and between business anthropologists and ethnographic practitioners from other disciplines. Also included in Chapter five is a discussion of identity protection and boundary maintenance between types of researchers. Chapter six allows the practitioners to offer insight into their view of themselves, their attitudes

toward their academic achievement, their perception of their value to employers, and their opinions of their employers.

Chapter seven begins the evaluative portion of the thesis with a comparison of the practice of the ethnographers, broken down into use of and attitude toward theory, and approach to data collection, analysis, and deliverable. In Chapter eight, there is an examination of practitioner work by both the researcher and the employer. In addition, success is considered in greater depth, as well as the negatives in practice. Finally, employers speak out on what they see as the differences between practitioners.

In “Conclusions,” Chapter nine, possible solutions are offered. These include proposals for a definition with increased clarity, inclusionary and exclusionary approaches to interdisciplinary practitioners, changing the metrics of success, and suggestions for future practitioners.

Finally, since the thesis looks at the affect of background on praxis, it is of value for the reader to know the status of the participants throughout the chapters. To that end, instead of forcing the reader to return repeatedly to the tables in Chapter two to identify who is saying what, a code is used behind each participant’s name. Table 1.1 displays the codes used to classify the participants.

**Table 1.1** Participants' codes

Anthropologist	A
“Ethnographer”	E
Employers/Client	EC
Employer/Client/Anthropologist	ECA
Employer/Client/Ethnographer	ECE

In addition to the codes above, the informant's highest-level educational achievement is included. For example, if Michael, an employer/client/ethnographer with a doctoral degree, were quoted, his name would appear Michael (ECE PhD).



## **Chapter 2    Methods**

The data for the study were collected in three ways, through participant observation, practitioner interviews, and reviewing the online posts of researchers on an electronic mailing list. Using three different methods helped to triangulate the information providing a more complete picture and increasing confidence in the validity of the data.

### **Participants**

Twenty interviews were conducted between July 21, 2004 and April 29, 2005. Respondents were chosen in order to recruit similar numbers of participants in four categories: anthropologists with doctoral degrees, anthropologists with master's degrees, practitioners other than anthropologists with doctorates, and practitioners other than anthropologists with master's degrees. Based on my observations working with 'ethnographers,' separating practitioners by academic disciplines and levels of education appeared viable criteria for choosing sample sets.

Twelve participants were chosen based either on my previous work with them at the companies mentioned above, from participant referrals, or from contact at professional meetings, such as conferences and gatherings held at local research firms. Two participants were sought out because of their reputation among other practitioners and because of their published work. The remaining six volunteered, coming from an

international Internet group known as “Anthrodesign.”<sup>1</sup> The nonparametric sampling strategy was built around maximizing difference in key categories. The process began by first mining the researcher’s network and then looking for additional participants which fell into the desired sampling categories. This strategy has been used by other anthropologists (Bestor 2002:148). In most cases, resumes or curricula vitae were requested from practitioners. Alternatively, Internet background checks were performed. This information provided additional insight into the experience and training of the researcher participants.

In order to research the differences in attitudes toward and practice of ethnography, I conducted fourteen interviews with practitioners: eight semi-structured interviews of ethnographers with backgrounds and training in anthropology and six interviews of ethnographers with other various backgrounds. Although extensive effort was put toward creating samples with sufficient representation of anthropologists and ethnographers, it was not possible to find enough willing ethnographers. To provide an outside perspective on practice and product, four employers were also interviewed. In addition, two participants fall into the category of having worked as ethnographers

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<sup>1</sup>An online group initiated by an anthropology doctoral candidate seeking to create a community of peers; the membership is comprised of researchers and designers in the broadly interpreted field of design anthropology. Some members call themselves anthropologists, while others call themselves designers, ethnographers, etc. The group is primarily connected through emails discussing such disparate topics such as literature recommendations for research projects, job listings, advice for newly minted “ethnographers,” and passionate discourse on the nature or philosophy of their work. There are also occasional regional social gatherings.

previously, while currently acting as managers of researchers which include those practicing ethnographic techniques.

The participants were chosen to create a sample that contained a variety of training, background, and attained academic levels. To that end, eight practitioners had obtained doctoral degrees and six held master's degrees. As the research progressed, it became apparent that the level of degree that the employer held influenced his view of the researcher. Therefore, I began recording the educational degrees of the employers. Of them, three held Ph.D.s and the fourth a master's degree. For the two crossover participants, one had a Ph.D.; the other had completed his Ph.D. course work, but not his dissertation (a status known as A.B.D., All But Dissertation).

Breaking down the participants by degree and background, for the anthropologists, five had attained Ph.D.s; three held master's degrees. For the other practitioners, three had the title of Ph.D. and the other three had master's degrees. Table 2.1 provides a matrix of all participants by degree and participant category.

**Table 2.1** Participants by category and education level

Degree	PhD	MA/S	ABD	Total
Anthropologist	5	3	0	8
Ethnographer	3	3	0	6
Employers	3	1	0	4
Crossovers	1	0	1	2
Totals	12	7	1	20

Regarding the academic disciplines in which the degrees were earned, all the participants in the anthropologist set had degrees in anthropology. For the group with various backgrounds not including anthropology, among the master degree holders, one had a degree in public policy, one in intercultural relations, and the third in computing

and information science. For those with doctorates, one had a degree in design, one in organizational studies, and one in social science. The Ph.D. employers had degrees in cognitive psychology, physics, and biology. The master's degree employer had attained his diploma in the field of cognitive psychology (table 2.2). If the employers and employer/crossover participants are not considered, there were seven males and seven females involved.

**Table 2.2** Participants' degree fields

	Masters Degree	Doctoral Degree
Ethnographers	Public Policy	Design
	Intercultural Relations	Organizational Studies
	Computing and Information Science	Social Science
Employers	Cognitive Psychology	Physics
	---	Cognitive Psychology
	---	Biochemistry
Crossover Participants	---	Cognitive Science
	---	Anthropology (ABD)

The participants ranged from interns to research directors working in a variety of capacities and industries including social research firms, international computer manufacturers, universities, and market-research companies. Table 2.3 lists practitioners by pseudonym with pertinent educational and then-current occupational information.

Andrew and Michael, the crossover participants, appear in the Tables 2.3 and 2.4 and are discussed beneath Table 2.4. For the other practitioners, Barbara, Jennifer, Lara, Sandra, and Tanya hold Ph.D.s in anthropology. Curtis, Doug, and Marcel have master's degrees in anthropology. Doctoral degree ethnographers include Burt in organizational studies, Charlene in social science, and Matthew in design. Completing the

ethnographer's group are Franco, Paul, and Sarah, who respectively earned master's degrees in public policy, computer and science information, and intercultural relations.

**Table 2.3** Practitioners (including those who cross categories) by pseudonym with pertinent information

Pseudonym	Cat.*	Deg	Field	Company Type	Title
Andrew	ECA	ABD	Anthropology	Research branch of international electronics firm	Research Manager
Barbara	A	PhD	Anthropology	Research branch of international electronics firm	Research Manager
Burt	E	PhD	Organizational Studies	Major university engineering department	Professor & Consultant
Charlene	E	PhD	Social Science	University affiliated social development program	Fellow/ Consultant
Curtis	A	MA	Anthropology	European design institute	PhD student UC Design
Doug	A	MS	Anthropology	Market research/ strategy company	Senior Researcher
Franco	E	MA	Public Policy	Social research firm, primarily health research	Research Director
Jennifer	A	PhD	Anthropology	Social research firm, primarily technology and health research	Research Director
Lara	A	PhD	Anthropology	Urban university anthropology department. Recent work on open-source community	Recent PhD & Professor at large
Marcel	A	MA	Anthropology	Consulting firm. Worked with military on software installation	Consultant
Matthew	E	PhD	Design	Research branch of international software developer	Recent PhD & User Researcher
Michael	ECE	PhD	Cognitive Science	Research branch of international electronics firm	Senior Manager, Research
Paul	E	MS	Computer & Informational Science	Small consultancy company	Owner/ Consultant
Sandra	A	PhD	Anthropology	Independent consultant, now with international electronics firm on government contract	Consultant/ Researcher Executive Director
Sarah	E	MA	Intercultural Relations	Market research/ strategy company	Intern
Tanya	A	PhD	Anthropology	Consulting firm	Principal Researcher

\* Categories conform to those in Table 1.1

The study included several participants with recent ties to academia. Lara (A PhD) and Matthew (E PhD) had recently completed their doctorates in their fields. Matthew had done an appreciable amount of ethnography with a sociologist mentor while in graduate school. He is about to start a new job as a researcher in a major software development firm. Lara works as lecturer at an urban university, having completed a dissertation on an open-source community and is seeking permanent employment. Curtis, who is classified as an M.A. practitioner for this study, holds a master's degree in anthropology and is studying for his Ph.D. in design at a European university. Finally, Sarah has completed her master's degree in intercultural relations, has worked as an intern in a research company, and holds a subsequent internship at a consulting firm.

As for the anthropology Ph.D. practitioners, Sandra and Tanya work as consultants, although at the time of her interview, Sandra is an employee of a large electronics firm, helping organizationally in the development of government hardware. Jennifer enjoys a position as a research director of an organization whose function is to provide information about future markets to client companies. Barbara is part of a small, but growing number of social scientists employed to assist internal functioning of an international electronic firm.

There are two additional sources of data which are part of this study. First, the Anthrodesign list provided numerous appropriate quotes that are interwoven into the fabric of this thesis. All quotes are included with permission and each author has been provided a pseudonym. Secondly, there was one additional practitioner who, although

not a participant in this study, agreed to let me use prior conversations as additional data. This Ph.D.-level anthropologist has taught both conventional and business anthropology classes at universities and has worked for major manufacturers both domestically and abroad. Her comments are attributed to the pseudonym Beryl.

For the employers (table 2.4), the chart includes information on the type of practitioners with which the employer/client had professional interaction. The category column indicates what relationship the employer-participant had with the practitioner, whether as an employer, with researchers on staff, or as a client, contracting with independent practitioners. The far right columns under the heading of 'practitioner experience' provide information as to what type of researcher the employer had experienced, anthropologist and/or ethnographer, and the participant's level of education.



**Table 2.4** Employers by pseudonym with pertinent information

Pseudo- nym	Category	Degree	Field	Company Type	Title	Practitioner Experience	
						Cat.	Deg
Andrew	Employer /Anth	ABD	Anth	International electronics firm	Manager of Research Division	A E	PhD PhD
Byron	Employer	PhD	Physics	Social research firm	Research Director	A E	PhD MA
Lawrence	Employer /Client	PhD	Cog Psych	International electronics firm	Senior Researcher Health Division	A E	PhD ?
Michael	Employer /Ethno	PhD	Cog Sci	International electronics firm	Senior Manager Research Division	A E	PhD PhD
Patrick	Client	PhD	Bio Chem	International manufacturer of personal & household products /University	Director Nutrition Division	A na	PhD na
Wendell	Employer /Client	MA	Cog Psych	Japan-based office equipment firm	Vice President of Research Division	A E	ABD PhD

Most of the employers have exposure to both anthropologists and ethnographers. The majority have dealt with Ph.D.-level degree holders. Three of the six have experience with contracted researchers in contrast to in-house practitioners. All are white males. The companies for which they work include four multinational high-technology firms (two participants are from different branches of the same company) and one under-fifty-employee consulting firms. They are referred to by pseudonym in this report.

Byron and Patrick hold Ph.D.s in the “hard” sciences, physics, and biochemistry, respectively. The other four, Wendell, Andrew, Michael, and Lawrence have degrees in

cognitive psychology/science. Andrew (ECA ABD) and Michael (ECE PhD), who appear in Tables 2.3 and 2.4, hold crossover positions as both employers and practitioners. Michael was introduced to ethnography in graduate school and he incorporated the techniques when he went on to manage a research division. Although he does not do fieldwork, he manages a team of ethnographers, and he is actively involved in project design and analysis. The remainder of the group either manages or has been clients of researchers. Patrick also maintains university affiliations. These participants act as consumers of the data with varying degrees of involvement in the research process.

During the project, I was able to perform participant observations with several companies, working with both anthropologists and ethnographers. One company is a Japan-based office electronics research and development facility. Further opportunity was offered by another electronics company who commissioned a study to gauge customer reaction to new product displays. The third company performs social research and provides the synthesized material to clients to help them forecast and make strategic business decisions. I was lucky enough to work with this last company on a number of projects, interacting with a variety of researchers for many different backgrounds, all conducting ethnography.

### **Methodology**

Since the objective of this study is to compare the praxis of the different types of researchers employing ethnography, it seemed that a natural approach would be to employ ethnographic methods. For the participant observation portion of the research, I worked closely with researchers, watching their praxis as I attempted to hone my own

skills. I followed along on interviews, met participants at field sites, sat quietly in an office taking notes as workers went about their daily routines. I attended meetings, did literature reviews, identified possible participants, pondered the meanings of behaviors and words, and negotiated boundaries with engineers. In short, I did everything a researcher does when she is doing her job.

At the Japan-based office electronics research and development facility, I functioned as an intern. The project was to perform onsite observations of a health provider's office with the aim of developing and deploying technology to streamline office tasks and improve communications between the management staff and the therapists. I worked with both an anthropologist and a consulting ethnographer, observing both the informants at the field site and the researchers.

At the second electronics company, I and another graduate-student researcher were hired to study customer response to an experimental merchandise display. In this case, I was the principle investigator and was able to obtain first-hand experience of the interaction between client and researcher and the client reaction to ethnographic methods.

I was fortunate to be able to work with a social research firm as an intern on three separate projects. Two studies were in the field of health care and the last involved young people's technology use. In addition to fieldwork, all three projects involved working with anthropologists, usually Ph.D.s, and "ethnographers," both M.A/S and Ph.D. holders.

For the interviews, the primary instrument for both practitioners and employers/clients was a script that initially asked descriptive questions and progressed

into evaluative probes. Although the preference and availability of the participants carried the most weight in the choice of locations, whenever possible I met with them at the place they considered to be their workspace, whether home or office. In total, eleven interviews were conducted face-to-face, eight of those in a workspace, three in other public places such as cafés and coffee shops (table 2.5). All interviews were taped via digital recorder with a backup recorder taping as well. The nine phone conversations were taped with the expressed knowledge and permission of the participants. All participants signed consent forms before they were interviewed.

**Table 2.5** Breakdown of interview venues by participant category

Method	Phone	Face to Face		Total
		Work place	Other	
Practitioners	3	7	3	13
Employers	3	1	0	4
Crossovers	2	1	0	3
Totals	8	9	3	20

The employer/client was asked to recall the experience of working with an ethnographer and/or an anthropologist. He was then asked to evaluate his experience with the researcher/s and whether he would employ an ethnographer or anthropologist again (Appendix I). The employer interview, took approximately an hour. Including the crossover participants (experienced with both performing ethnography and managing ethnographers), all of the six employer/clients had worked with both anthropologists and ethnographers (table 2.6). The employer/client sessions took approximately one hour.

**Table 2.6** Employer/client experience with different types of researchers

Type	Ethnographer		Anthropologist		
	MA	PhD	MA	ABD	PhD
Employer/Client – Wendell		X		X	
Employer – Byron	X				X
Employer/Client – Lawrence	Not specified				X
Client – Patrick	Not specified				X
Crossover – Andrew		X			X
Crossover – Michael		X		Not specified	

The discussion with the practitioner started with general questions about their job (Appendix II). Interviews were taped as with the employers. The practitioner interviews generally lasted two hours. When the interview was conducted in the practitioner participant's workspace, I took digital photographs as the informant led me on a tour of their workspace. The intention was to capture artifacts in the space that might provide further insight into work practice and priorities. These pictures were transfer to hard disk and again, password locked. The pictures were later incorporated into the interview text, affording a visual enhancement to the transcripts.

Participants were asked to recap a project that he or she had managed from inception through final deliverable. The project recall served two purposes: (1) it enabled me to collect detailed data about their work practices; and (2) it provided them with a refreshed memory from which to construct their evaluations later in the interview. The interview concluded with questions about the participant's view of ethnography, his or her satisfaction level regarding his or her work, and his or her sense of contribution.

The final component of the research involved reading accounts of ethnographic studies by both participant and non-participant ethnographers. In addition to the

employer interviews, these reports allowed me to examine the practitioner's product. They also served to enriched and enlarge my sample population.

### **Analysis**

All interviews and field notes were transcribed. They were then stored on hard disks and password protected. All participant names were changed to codes and the files password protected. The transcriptions were then entered into AnSWR, freeware analysis software for qualitative research, provided by the Center for Disease Control (available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/software/answr.htm>). The coding process began by deconstructing the interviews using the instrument questions as a framework. Table 2.7 catalogs the working four themes and twenty-seven sub-themes.

**Table 2.7** Project themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Background/training	Education Influences/Mentors Learning ethnography Previous work experiences Seminal experiences
Work Practice	Application of theory Code-switching/tropes Degree of practitioner control over project Giving back: teaching, writing Goals Methodology Motivations
Relationship to their work	Achievements/successes Attitude toward employers/clients Attitude toward work Downsides (Frustrations, unhappiness) Upsides (Benefits, happiness)
Attitudes and evaluations	Attitude toward "ethnographers" Attitude toward "ethnography" Attitude toward anthropologists Attitude toward education degree Attitude toward theory Definition of "ethnography" Evaluation of their work by others Evaluation of their work by self Identified differences in practice between practitioners Opinion of their own value added

An additional consideration is the issue of bias. As an anthropology master's candidate with experience using the methodology under consideration, I qualified as a participant. I had experienced the tension between the two different types of practitioners. In one instance, this tension led to an uncomfortable working situation resulting in my resignation from a job. Another time, when I posted my first email looking for additional participants through the Anthrodesign email list serve, I

inadvertently used language carelessly, characterizing my research as contrasting anthropologists and “ethnographers.” The result was a small flurry of emails discussing, to my delight, ethnography and ethnographers. Unfortunately, one of my existing participants, an ethnographer with a background in computer science, became concerned with my etymological lack of precision and felt it revealed a “conflictual stance” which hindered the cross-disciplinary work, “which is hard enough as it is.”

Even though the consequences ultimately worked to my advantage – several of my participants came from that discussion – I became aware of the vulnerability that practitioners experience. It served as a reminder that words, especially titles, have power and that it is always important as a researcher to maintain an open mind and guarded tongue. Luckily, after working with my participants, I developed an appreciation for all the researchers I studied – those involved in creating knowledge, working to save jobs, or trying to change a client’s perception of who is his customer.



### Chapter 3     Background and History

Barbara and I have been talking for close to two hours about her work. Her office is in a high-security building, down a long hallway. I have not seen anyone else in the building except Barbara and the receptionist since I entered the building. Barbara's office is very neat and smallish, with built in cabinets along three sides of the room. Her desk is U-shaped and she sits on one side of the right leg of the U while I sit on the other. In addition to discussing her work, we've talked about the poster in her room (related to a technology group to which she belongs), why she has relatively few books on her shelves (most of her books are at home, where she also works), why there is a basket of water on her desk (leftovers from a conference yesterday). It is time to start wrapping up and so I ask my typically awkwardly phrased parting question: "Have I not asked something that you would have asked if you were conducting this interview?" Luckily, she understands and as usual, it generates a rich response: "I think a really interesting question is how is it that anthropology-slash-ethnography is continually rediscovered by the outside world, [laughter] if you will, outside of the academic context. It would be really interesting to know. It would be really interesting to know to what degree that discovery changes -- what the source of the discovery is and how that changes over the years. I don't have a good story myself about it. I've lived it, but I don't have a good story about it. But, I don't know what kind of frame you're going to put your project in, but a lot of people put it in just discovered - right? Even when they know that it's not just being discovered, there's some reason to want to talk about it as a new discovery: 'Oh my God! There are anthropologists that work in corporations? Who'd have thought it?' It's been going on for twenty years!"

Since the Hawthorne studies (detailed below), anthropologists have been seen sporadically in industrial, corporate, and other business settings. There is a fairly recent trend in business and industry to employ anthropologists and other practitioners of ethnographic methods to gain insight about companies and their customers. *Technology Review*, an MIT publication, called ethnography "a blossoming field" based on its evaluation of the 2005 Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference (EPIC) (Fitzgerald

2005). The conference was sponsored by a collaboration of anthropologists at Intel and Microsoft for practitioners of ethnography. Randall et al. (2005), participants at EPIC, maintained that ethnography has become almost the *sine qua non* of contemporary practice in Computer Supported Collaborative Work.

The practice of employing ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviewing in business and industry is a trend seen not only in the United States, but also throughout the world. There is an international contingent of design/business/industrial/corporate ethnographers. For example, members of the Anthrodesign group are based in numerous countries and participants at the EPIC came from Japan, Belgium, Denmark, Brazil, United Kingdom, and India as well as North America (EPIC 2006). However, this study focuses primarily on activity in the United States.

### **Who Hires Ethnographers**

Acceptance of ethnographic methods as a qualitative research technique in business has opened up new opportunities for practitioners. Why are employers and clients hiring researchers who use ethnographic methods? Below are a few of the reasons cited by employers in the popular press.

- “Kent Solberg, SRAM's global industrial design manager said, ‘We wouldn't have had the insight we had without the ethnographic research’” (Wellner 2003).
- ““Ethnographic research isn't glamorous and it takes a lot of standing around, but when you get that 'ah-ha!' it's worth it,’ says John Shambroom, Aspect's director of engineering” (Wellner 2003).

- ““Sometimes you don't want to hear what you need to hear,’ says [Ken Conklin, general manager of the Pier 5 and two other hotels]. ‘Ethnographic research opens up your eyes’” (Wellner 2003).
- “When divining ‘unarticulated needs,’ surveys and focus groups are not enough. In recent years, Kellogg has started also employing up-close-and-personal techniques called ethnography... ‘This comes partly from the desire to move more aggressively in innovation and also out of a recognition that the old methods weren't taking us far enough... You need to get into people's lives’” (Pethokoukis 2006).

Insight, changing perception, uncovering unexpressed needs, these are the reasons employers and clients are turning to ethnography. They also acknowledged its role in business planning and strategy formation.

- “[Pat] Gelsinger [, a senior vice president at Intel] emphasized that the impact of these new scientists has been more than just in tactical product development; they’ve also played a key role in long-term strategic planning” (Fitzgerald 2006).

Who are the people and organizations who employ anthropologists and non-anthropologist ethnographers? Table 3.1 lists some of the various United States companies and organizations employing anthropologists/ethnographers. The list is not inclusive, but it is representative of the entities using researchers who practice ethnographic methodologies. Large companies often have staff ethno-researchers or

entire research units as in the case of the People and Practices division at Intel in Oregon, the Work and Organizational Context Group at IBM Research Almaden Services Research Group in San José, California, Xerox Palo Alto Research Center, or as part of Microsoft in Redmond, Washington. Smaller companies are more likely to hire contract ethno-researchers or ethnographic research companies. However, at the 2005 Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference, Marietta Baba noted, “There are so many ethnographers working directly for firms. ‘In the past, it was consultants coming in’” (Fitzgerald 2005).

The listing is compiled from attendance lists at EPIC, from consulting firms’ websites, and from postings to the Anthrodesign group elist and is by no means exhaustive. However, it is interesting to note that there are at least three times as many firms that hire consultant ethnographers as there are companies employing practitioners directly. This trend is not reflected in the study participants – six were consultants, seven were employees and one discussed his/her doctoral work (see Chapter three).

**Table 3.1** Sample of companies that employ ethnographers and/or ethnographer consulting firms

Companies employing staff ethnographers	Companies utilizing consultant ethnographers		Consulting firms using ethnographic methods
Apple	Aeroteck	Intuit	Adaptive Path
Research Labs	Allstate	Johnson &	BBDO Worldwide
AT&T	American Heart	Johnson	BRS
Battelle Memorial	Association	Levi Strauss	Cheskin
Institute	Ann Taylor	Lexmark	Conifer Research
BBDO Advertising	AOL	Marriott	Context Based
eBay	Apple Computers	Microsoft	Research Group
Exxon	Bank of America	Corporation	Design Science
General Motors	Blue Cross Blue	Motorola	Doblin Group
Google	Shield	Nestle	Envirosell
Herman Miller	Association	Nike	Ethnographic
IBM Corporation	Casio	Plantronics Inc.	Insight Inc.
Intel Corporation	Centers for	Procter & Gamble	Ethnographic
Intuit	Disease	Reuters	Research, Inc.
Kodak	Control	Robert Wood	Fiori Inc.
Microsoft	CIGNA	Johnson	Fit Associates
Corporation	Coca-Cola	Foundation	Frog Design
Motorola	ConAgra	Royal Caribbean	GfK Group (including
NASA	DaimlerChrysler	SAP	NOP World)
Nokia	Dell	Sarah Lee	Herbst LaZar Bell
Pitney Bowes	Deloitte	Corporation	Housecalls, Inc.
Ricoh Innovations Inc.	Dreyer's	Shell	IDEO
Steelcase Inc	eBay	Siemens	In-Sync Consumer
Sun Microsystems, Inc.	Epson	Sprint	Insight
Trend Micro	FedEx Kinko's	Steelcase	Institute For The
US Bank	Ford Motor	Taco Bell	Future
Wells Fargo	Company	Time Warner	Jump Associates
Whirlpool	Gap	U.S. Air Force	Luth Research
Xerox PARC	General Electric	Unilever	MakeTools
Yahoo!	General Mills	UPS	Matrix Research
	General Motors	Visa	Point Forward
	GlaxoSmithKline	Washington Post	Portugal Consulting
	GMAC Mortgage	Weight Watchers	Qualidata
	Corporation	Whirlpool	Sapient
	Hallmark	Wrangler	Social Solutions, Inc.
	Herman Miller,	Yahoo!	Social Technologies
	Inc.		SonicRim
	Hewlett-Packard		Tactics, LLC
	Honda		Terranova Group, Inc.
	Intel Corporation		Trend Influence
			Veri-Phi Consulting

## **Scope of the Phenomenon**

It would be useful to determine how widespread the use of ethnography has become. However, there are no direct measurements of the number of practitioners (even determining who is a practitioner, other than via self-reporting, would be problematic because of the variety of monikers under which people practice). Fortunately, there are indirect methods by which to gauge its magnitude. As was mentioned above, one metric is the attendance at the EPIC. In its first year, 2005, 219 people attended (Participants 2005). The number of attendees in 2006 increased to 300 (Ken Anderson, personal communication, November 28, 2006). EPIC was designed for anyone who had “trained for and [was] practicing ethnography in a business context” (Mission 2006). It was open to all with an interest in the practice of ethnography.

Hendrick Serrie (1986) pointed out other signs of the growth of ethnography including anthropology and anthropological concepts appearing in business school classes, journals, and conferences. Anthropologists are also being included in business school faculties and are increasingly involved in marketing, international trade, and organizational research.

The National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) member database (NAPA Directory 2006) has no search capability to retrieve ‘ethnographer.’ However, a search of the member directory (1697 as of 11/06/06) for various keywords produced few correspondences (see Table 3.2). Additionally, there was a selection criterion of ‘method,’ but ‘ethnography’ was not an option.

**Table 3.2** NAPA member database selected for associated keywords

Keyword/s			#
Other Associations	Areas of Expertise	Employment Area	
Anthrodesign	--	--	3
--	Business and industry	--	11
--	Computer Science	--	3
--	Corporate culture	--	7
--	Evaluation, assessment, strategic planning	--	4
--	Information technology	--	11
--	Marketing research	--	0
--	Qualitative market research	--	2
--	Work – organization design	--	1
--	--	Advertising and marketing	0
--	--	Direct services/applied research/mgmt/consulting	8
--	--	Research and development	11

Searching other professional groups yields additional information about number of practitioners. Computer-Human Interaction (CHI) is an interdisciplinary organization. Many members employ ethnographic methods. The schedule for their annual conference, CHI 2006, is available and searchable online (Welcome to CHI 2006 2006). A query for the term “ethnograph” yielded forty-four matches. The online Anthrodesign group, started in 2002 with open membership, listed 835 members as of August 29, 2006 and 1377 on April 15, 2008, a 64 percent increase in less than two years. It is not possible, other than by polling, to determine the background of the membership.

There is also evidence in the fourth estate that ethnography is gaining prominence. Table 3.3 presents a list of news sources which have published or broadcast stories regarding ethnography and/or ethnographers.

**Table 3.3** News organizations that publish articles about ethnography/ethnographers

Associated Press	Fortune	PC Magazine
Business Week	Frontline	Rake Mag
Chicago Tribune	Inc	San Francisco Chronicle
CNN.com	Information Week	Seattle Post-Intelligencer
ComputerWorld	Mercury News	MIT Technology Review
Economist	Newsday	The New York Times
Fast Company	Newsweek	Toronto Star
Financial Times	NPR	USA Today

Table 3.4 lists a number of technical or trade publications that have recently published articles on aspects of the practice.

**Table 3.4** Technical/trade publications that publish articles about ethnographers and ethnography

AME Info	LOOP: AIGA Journal of Interaction
Corante	Design Education
Design Management Journal	Market Wire News
Design Management Review	Next D
DM News	QRCA Views
HCI	thewisemarketer.com
Harvard Business School Working Knowledge	Visions Magazine

One last indicator of the extent of this phenomenon is the number of colleges and universities offering bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees in applied anthropology (table 3.5). Though not all the degrees are specifically oriented to business, industry, organizations, or design, they do show that the interest in application is sufficient to create demand for twenty-four universities to offer programs.



**Table 3.5** Institutions offering degrees in applied anthropology

Institution	Degrees
American University	BA, MA, PhD
California State University – East Bay	BA, MA
California State University – Long Beach	BA, MA
Georgia State University	BA, MA
Indiana University – Purdue University at Indianapolis	BA
Mississippi State University	BA, MA
Montclair State University	BA, MA
Northern Arizona University	BA, MA
Oregon State University	BA/S, MA, PhD
San Jose State University	BA, MA
Santa Clara University	BA
The George Washington University	BA, MA, PhD
U. of Alaska - Anchorage	BA, BS, MA
U. of Arizona	BA, MA, PhD
U. of Florida - Gainesville	BA, MA, PhD
U. of Georgia	BA, PhD
U. of Kentucky	BA/S, MA/S, PhD
U. of Maryland	BA, MA, PhD
U. of Memphis	BA, MA
U. of North Carolina - Greensboro	BA
U. of North Texas	BA, MA/S
U. of South Florida	BA, MA, PhD
U. of Texas at San Antonio	BA, MA
Wayne State University	BA, MA, PhD
Source: the Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology, website <a href="http://www.copaa.info/programs_in_aa/list.htm">http://www.copaa.info/programs_in_aa/list.htm</a>	

## History of Business Anthropology

In a recent journal article, Intel anthropologist Genevieve Bell explained, “Ethnography comes out of anthropology. Anthropology would be the study of people and culture at a pretty broad level” (2004:3). Given ethnography’s strong ties to and arguably genesis in anthropology, understanding it in its current context requires a knowledge of applied anthropology’s roots. “The term ‘applied anthropology’ is used in both Britain and the United States to refer mainly to the employment of anthropologists by organizations involved in inducing change or enhancing human welfare” (Bennett

1996:S25). Practitioners are employed either partially or entirely by non-academic organizations. George Foster (1969:54) offered, “‘Applied anthropology’ is the phrase commonly used by anthropologists to describe their professional activities in programs that have as primary goals changes in human behavior believed to ameliorate contemporary social, economic, and technological problems, rather than the development of social and cultural theory.” For the purposes of this study, which looks primarily at United States practitioners, the history reflects a bias toward events in North America.

#### Earliest Examples of Business Anthropology

Perhaps the first use of anthropology for a business application could be attributed to Fr. Joseph Lafitau in the early 1700s. His work with indigenous people in the New World was used in part to establish a ginseng trade with Europe (van Willigen 2002). After Lafitau, Henry Schoolcraft also studied North American Indians for the U.S. Congress, producing what amounted to a policy report (van Willigen 2002). Beginning in the early 1800s, both Great Britain and the Netherlands formalized the discipline, offering ethnologically-based training programs for colonial officers (van Willigen 2002).

Circa 1860, anthropology emerged as a distinct discipline (van Willigen 2002). Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) has been acknowledged as the father of British colonial anthropology. He not only defined the field, but also was responsible for the training of a generation of fieldworkers, emphasizing conscientious ethnology (Bennett 1996).

As in Europe, much of American’s early anthropology work involved indigenous people. In 1879, Congress established the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) as a

unit of the Smithsonian, to function as a policy research arm of the federal government, to collect and process data to assist in the administration of Indian affairs (A History of the Department of Anthropology 2006). While discussing the BAE's work in 1902, James Mooney used the term "applied ethnology" (van Willigen 2002). The research in various forms continued almost until World War II.

### Government Work – Challenging Assumptions

Between 1860 and 1910, researchers worked for governments or private foundation-supported administrative programs intended to control native populations and study immigrants, later to establish development policy (van Willigen 2002), and often to problematize native-dominant culture/government interactions. Their findings often ran counter to the then popularly-held ideas of their employers. Examples include work by James Mooney and Franz Boas. Mooney's research on the Ghost Dance Movement challenged evolutionary theory and the idea of the "noble savage" by demonstrating that American indigenous peoples were more complex than the dominant framework for the period (Elliott 1998). The morphological work on immigrants that Boas conducted for the U.S. Immigration Service refuted beliefs about race and physical characteristics (van Willigen 2002), by providing evidence that environment was a significant factor in determining phenotype (Boas 1912). In 1905, when the first anthropology department was established at Oxford University, it was created to train colonial administrators (Fortes 1953).

Later, the Applied Anthropology Unit was established in the Office of Indian Affairs (which became the Bureau of Indian Affairs) to review the likelihood of

American Indian tribes creating self-governance organizations as a result of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (Collier 1936 quoted in van Willigen 2002, Mekeel 1944; Thompson 1956). The group was not very effective in swaying policy, but did make anthropologists more prominent to government agencies. John Collier, who created the Unit, is credited with triggering the increase of federal employment of anthropologists.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture started hiring anthropologists as researchers on a variety of projects. In fact, they lent the Bureau of Indian Affairs some of their anthropologists for an interdisciplinary group working on projects related to economic and resource development on Indian reservations (van Willigen 2002). Anthropologists were also used by the USDA in the Rio Grande Basin project researching cultural aspects of land use. Additionally, they did fieldwork for the USDA in the Rural Life Studies looking at opportunities for development. Walter Goldschmidt did work for USDA on war mobilization in a rural California county and studied political economy of agribusiness in the San Joaquin valley. As a result of the corruption and influence pedaling he discovered he was vilified by California's agribusiness (van Willigen 2002).

Further work on American Indian reservations was done in 1941 when the Indian Personality and Administration Research Project was created. It resulted in studies of reservation life which were used for policy formation (van Willigen 2002). This project was an example of the use of action research methodology. Action research was a technique developed by psychologist Kurt Lewin. It functioned by addressing an urgent problem using heavy participation by the affected community, with little interference by

researchers, other than to provide democratic guidance and to develop indigenous leaders, encouraging an organic solution (Thompson 1950).

Other early anthropological work included an investigation by the Women's Anthropological Society of Washington, D.C. in 1896, which was instrumental in the construction of 808 low-cost housing units (Schensul and Schensul 1978). The emphasis of the group was to understand social problems as a means of ameliorating them. Interestingly, when the Women's Anthropological Society joined with the Washington Anthropological Society, a regional academic association, the focus on social issues evaporated. Schensul and Schensul (1978) propose this as evidence of the iron grip that the academic paradigm maintained within the discipline's professional organizations.

#### Hands-off Attitude

As anthropology entered the 1920s, social evolutionary theory gave way to structural-functionalism and historical anthropology (van Willigen 2002). It was during this period that the tradition of embracing a "value-free" approach developed. It was believed that an anthropologist who moved beyond the role of consultant was no longer an anthropologist, but a "specialist" who risked abandoning the value-free viewpoint (van Willigen 2002) and was in jeopardy of losing his or her objectivity.

The employment of anthropologists in non-academic work has shown to be negatively correlated to the number of jobs available at universities. During the Great Depression and New Deal, the academic job market was very limited (and remained so until WWII). Correspondingly, U.S. anthropologists were employed in increasing numbers for work on applied projects. In fact, "The intensification of anthropological

employment in applied work reached a climax with the war” (van Willigen 2002:25-26).

Foreshadowing the future of industrial anthropology, George Foster commented that it was apparent that U.S. anthropologists had a greater interest in the “social aspects of technological development than their British counterparts” (1969:194).

#### Hawthorne – Western Electric Project

As an example of that interest, in 1927 the study that inaugurated anthropology into the area of business/industry research was launched – the Hawthorne Project. Australian psychiatrist Elton Mayo, a peer of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, began collaborative work with the Harvard Committee on Industrial Physiology and the Western Electric Company to conduct research on working conditions and their affect on levels of productivity at the Hawthorne plant in Chicago (Baba 1986). Anthropologists associated with the Committee on Human Relations in Industry at the University of Chicago included W. Lloyd Warner, who joined the project in 1931 (Baba 1986, Jordan 2003), and Burleigh B. Gardner. Goldschmidt saw this project as the start of applied anthropology (2001). Chapple (1953) asserted that the Hawthorne studies were “the first important and generative introduction of anthropology into the study of modern industrial and political institutions.”

The initial objective of the Hawthorne research was to explore the relationship between the physical conditions of labor and worker productivity (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939). Early on in the experiments, it became obvious that the productivity of the experimental groups of workers fluctuated exclusive of any physical or psychological conditions that the researchers could pinpoint. The conclusion was that previously

unnoticed social processes affected output (Baba 1986). The discovery that other variables besides the physical environment could influence productivity was so surprising it convinced Mayo to change his experiment goals (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939).

It was one of the earliest-recorded instances of industrial data gathered *in situ*, producing the first organized account of the social interactions within work groups (Chapple 1953). It revealed a significant social system within the factory that had previously been invisible. The realization had a major impact on the development of human relations theory influencing organizational science for the next twenty-five years (Baba 1986). *Management and the Worker*, the book releasing the findings of the Hawthorne Project, was published in 1939 by Roethlisberger and Dickson (Baba 1986).

However, Baba (2006c) felt that Mayo did significant harm in strong-arming his researchers, including anthropologist Warner, into accepting his view that tension or conflict within the plant was the result of worker maladjustment. Rather, the choices they made – specifically, to not work too hard – were not evidence of rebellion, but a reaction to their distrust of management and the subsequent demands they feared would be asked of them if they were to perform above quota. Mayo's view was in alignment with the thinking of the time, relating to the functional equilibrium theory school of management, which saw workers and management existing in a base state of harmony and disruptions to that state as pathological elements that must be dealt with using a therapeutic approach. This mindset influenced industrial researchers, including anthropologists, for decades, deterring them from investigating the effect of power inequities on morale and performance.

After the project disbanded, the researchers continued on successful career paths. W. Elliot Warner, in 1943, was named chair of the newly formed Committee on Human Relations in Industry at the University of Chicago (Baba 1986). Later, in 1946, Warner and Gardner established Social Research Inc, a management consulting company (Baba 1986). It was the first example of anthropological entrepreneurship (Baba 1986). It provided the model for future private sector anthropological consultants (Baba 1986).

Other notable anthropologists conducting research in industrial settings included Benjamin Whorf who, in the 1930s, noticed how language affected workers' actions. He observed that workers, who would not smoke among full gasoline tanks, would smoke around labeled, empty tanks, because the word "empty" implied safety, even though the vapors in the depleted tanks were more flammable than the liquid fuel (Whorf 1941).

During the pre-World War II and World War II periods, U.S. government agencies hired anthropologists to conduct various types of social research. In 1940, the National Research Council established two research committees. One was the Committee on Food Habits with Ruth Benedict, William L. Werner, and later Margaret Mead, which studied nutrition levels of the American population (*The Problem of Changing Food Habits*, 1943). It also set up the committee for National Morale with Gregory Bateson, Elliot Chapple, and Margaret Mead to establish how anthropology and psychology could be used to improve wartime morale (van Willigen 2002).

During WWII, Margaret Mead (1977) estimated that over 95 percent of American Anthropologists worked to support the war effort. In 1941, the AAA passed a resolution offering the "skill and knowledge of its members, at the disposal of the country"



(American Anthropological Association 1942:42). Out of this spirit of cooperation came publications such as Ruth Benedict's work for the Office of the War, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 1946 (Wasson 2006). Anthropologists also worked for the War Relocation Authority to mitigate problems that had occurred at some of the relocation camps by acting as liaisons between the Japanese American internees and the administration. The work was controversial because the anthropologists' liaison role was perceived as coercive rather than supportive (van Willigen 2002).

#### The Formation of Professional Organization

Then in 1941, a professional organization for applied practitioners was formed by, among others, students of Warner: Eliot Chapple and Conrad Arensberg (Jordan 2003). The first president of the fledgling Society for Applied Anthropology (SFAA) was Chapple (Past Presidents 2006). Ironically, one of the most valuable tools for practicing anthropologists, ethics guidelines, was not developed until 1949 (van Willigen 2002). The SFAA was not recognized by the American Anthropological Association as an associated organization until 1971 (Schensul and Schensul 1978).

New qualitative methodologies were developed. During the 1940s, industrial anthropology was primarily conducted by researchers trained at Harvard and the University of Chicago. The work was conducted using a functionalist framework (Jordan 2003). Chapple and Arensberg created "interaction analysis" to quantify human behavior (Baba 1986) and predict discrete components of interaction (Reese 2002). The methodology employed both qualitative and quantitative components (Jordan 2003). Another innovation of the era was industrial case studies (Baba 1986). Human factors

analysis evolved out of the need for the U.S. military to mitigate the number of pilots killed during training exercises by redesigning cockpits for more logical, user-intuitive layout (Reese 2002).

Until that time, anthropologists had worked with governments while maintaining their academic ties. Their role had been to ameliorate situations rather than to make drastic change, maintaining the role of researcher-instructor-consultant (van Willigen 2002). During this period, they became more involved in “implementation and intervention.” Problem solution became part of the job description. The “value-free” perspective of anthropologists was challenged. This approach came to be understood as a value-implicit methodology, in which anthropologists would explicitly “define goals and values for client[s].” In addition, anthropology became increasingly action oriented. They were asked to undertake increased direct involvement and to be active in producing change.

In 1948, Sol Tax was asked by the anthropology department of the University of Chicago to start a field-training program for ethnology students at the Fox Reservation in Iowa. Tax pushed his students to consider the Fox people’s point of view and aspirations (Bennett 1996). Tax championed the use of action anthropology, as did Laura Thompson, acting as advocate and change agent for informant-participants (Bennett 1996).

### Back to Academia

After WWII, the trend of working in non-academic settings started to reverse as university positions opened to meet burgeoning demand. Using their government

benefits, returning veterans expanded college enrollment that required an increase of faculty in university departments. This enrollment surge continued through the 1960s as the veterans' children were also eligible for college assistance through the "G.I. Bill." The expansion of the academic job market was augmented by a reluctance to take government posts during the Vietnam War (van Willigen 2002). Jobs in academia became more plentiful while anthropologists left private and public sector positions.

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, new research theories and methodologies continued to develop and groups other than anthropologists became interested in how humans interact with the tools they use. The philosophies of human relations and functional equilibrium – that decreases in productivity and efficiency were caused by ineffective communication and that disequilibrium could be rectified and harmony restored – gave way to a new contingency theory of organization. Starting in the 1960s, the focus was on environments, technology, and organizational conflict (Baba 1986). The Human Factors Society was founded in 1956 (Reese 2002). Human factors practitioners originally came from the areas of behavioral and experimental psychology. However, anthropologists quickly joined their ranks and influenced human factors theory with the anthropological perspective (Reese 2002).

#### Marxism and Distrust of Institutions

The 1960s saw antagonism build between anthropologists and corporations. The return of anthropologists to academia and the rise of multinational corporations led to an increase of fieldwork done in foreign locales (Baba 1986). However, it did not lead to an

exchange of data between corporations and anthropologists; the culture of the 60s tended to be anti-corporate and the acceptable uses of applied anthropology were hotly debated.

Two events occurred during this period that created distrust for anthropologists and hindered the ability of anthropologists inclined to work for non-academic employers: Project Camelot and the Vietnam War. Project Camelot was a military initiative to gather information that would assist the military in dealing with ongoing internal conflict in Latin America. Social scientists were sought as researchers. When a newspaper in Chile reported the project, Latin America launched protests and the project was abandoned. Nevertheless, the possibility that anthropologists could have participated, breaking professional ethics by violating confidentiality, disturbed the anthropological community (Jordan 2003). Then, during the Vietnam War, the AAA printed an employment notice for the U.S. government, searching for anthropologists to evaluate propaganda at the Psychological Operations Headquarters in Vietnam. The anthropology body reacted strongly, concerned that research would be used against the Vietnamese people, and that the research would be classified and therefore could not be evaluated (Jordan 2003). As a result, the AAA adopted the *Principles of Professional Responsibility* (later revised in 1978), which proscribed work that resulted in proprietary knowledge effectively crippling work in industry. The association encouraged practitioners to return to a strictly advocacy role. Marxism and dependency theory added fuel to the controversy (Baba 1986). With the lack of enthusiasm for the corporate paradigm and the inability to comply with corporations' confidentiality requirements, few anthropologists chose to work in industry (Baba 1986).

Nonetheless, small numbers of anthropologists continued to work for corporations, gathering valuable cross-cultural information about the worldwide spread of industrialization and labor-management relations, workforce reactions, entrepreneurship, institutional forms, and kinship structures (Baba 1986). This small group of researchers studied the cross-cultural transfer of technical innovations (Arensberg and Niehoff 1964) and was able to document ethnographically the cross-cultural variations in hierarchical structures, employer-worker relationships, and charters of corporations (Abegglen 1958; Nakane 1970; Rohlen 1974).

Adding to the animosity between businesses and anthropologists from 1960 to 1980 was the prevalence of Marxist theory. Researchers attempted to expose management's worker-exploitation strategies. As a result of the Marxist influence, management and enterprise were in effect derided. Workers' counter-strategies were documented and their work practices were documented, revealing their knowledge, creativity, and ingenuity (Baba 1998). At this time, formal organization theory was controlled by industrial engineering, economics, and psychology (Baba 1998).

Despite the scarcity of work being produced, theory continued to be developed. During the 1960s and 1970s, Alvin Wolfe (1963, 1977) developed his theory of supranational global organizations integrated through the action of multinational and transnational corporations. Although controversial, his work demonstrated the creative potential of basic anthropological inquiry in this period. There were also theoretical advances in cognitive and symbolic anthropology during this era (Wallace 1962). The

value of these developments is only now being fully understood in private sector research (Baba, 1986).

The decade of the 1970s was a slow period with respect to anthropologists working in industry. However, there are still a few events worth noting. The 1970s saw the beginning of companies destined to exert a great influence in the field of design/business/industrial/ organizational anthropology. In 1970, Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC) was founded (PARC History 2006). Later, in 1979, anthropologist Lucy Suchman was hired by PARC. She worked on raising awareness of the difficulty involved in designing interactive technology (Reese 2002). On most copying machines today, there is a green button that users associate with starting the copy process. There is an enduring myth that it was Suchman's research that resulted in Xerox placing the "big green button" on their copying machines. In actuality, Xerox was working to produce a "user friendly" copier, with little to no upfront learning involved. Her video footage of computer scientists struggling to make copies illustrated to designers at Xerox that there was no such thing as technology that involved zero initial learning investment (Suchman 2007). The hiring of Suchman is argued by Wasson (2005:141) to be the start of "design-oriented ethnographic praxis." Also during this time, Ron Sears, a post-doctoral candidate in experimental psychology, joined NCR and headed a poly-locational human factors group that spearheaded 200 product design changes that saved the company (Reese 2002).

Additionally, anthropologists started banding together at a regional level and local practitioner organizations (LPOs) began to organize. In 1974, the first of its kind was

established in Tucson, Arizona – the Society of Professional Anthropologists (SOPA) (Formerly Active Local Practitioner Organizations 1988, van Willigen 2002). It was created to help facilitate networking between anthropologists.

### Resurgence of Interest

Starting in the 1980s, fortune began to align itself with applied anthropologists, enhancing interest in anthropology and easing business anthropologists' ethical constraints. In October of 1980, an article by a staff writer appeared in *Business Week* introducing the idea of cultures existing within business. The uncredited author posited that these cultures, created by the CEOs and their managers' behaviors, led ultimately to the success or failure of the business (Anonymous 1980). On the heels of this article, two books were published which expanded and reinforced the concept of a culture within institutions. The first was *In Search of Excellence* (1982) by McKinsey & Company guru and Stanford University lecturer Thomas Peters and co-author Robert Waterman. Next to be published was Terrence Deal and Allen Kennedy's book, *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* (1982), which was admittedly based on Peters' early work (Moore 1988). From 1980 to 1998, the Japanese Quality Movement gained recognition and popularized the term 'culture' (Jordan 2003). The focus on process required managerial understanding of actual work practices. Thanks to the work of anthropologists such as PARC's Julian Orr (1996), management realized the inherent economic value of implicit worker knowledge. The goal of finding, encapsulating, manipulating, and transmitting workers' knowledge became a primary concern for management (Baba 1998).

Also in the early 1980s, professional organizations became more responsive to applied anthropologists' needs. As a result of the increase of anthropologists returning to work in industry and corporations, the AAA and the SFAA reversed their position on proprietary work (Jordan 2003, van Willigen 2002). This allowed anthropologists already in the field, as well as those entering the private sector workforce, to honor confidentiality requirements with corporations. The organization that has been most attuned to business anthropology, the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) was founded. Jim Downs was the first president (National Association for the Practice of Anthropology 2006).

There are numerous examples of anthropologists working in business during this time. In 1982, Ron Sears, along with Richardson/Smith co-researchers Chuck Leinbach (designer cum lawyer) and Liz Sanders performed behavioral studies to determine why customers preferred Japanese copiers to Xerox's products. The results helped improve Xerox's failing sales (Reese 2002). In the early 1980s, Sears and coworkers at Richardson/Smith shared ideas with researchers at PARC. Almost coincidentally, they begin using video in onsite design research (Reese 2002). Another new area of research included "ethnography in product design" (Wasson 2000).

In the 1980s, theoretical constructs were heavily influenced by the postmodernist perspective. As postmodernism gained popularity and promoted reflexivity in anthropologists, it encouraged practitioners to see their participants as unique entities rather than 'subjects.' Ethnography began to take on different meanings, depending on the practitioner's affiliation. Academic anthropology began to see ethnography as a



reflexive exercise. Applied anthropology perceived it as an opportunity to work collaboratively with the participants/community (van Willigen 2002).

Serrie (1986b) stated that business anthropology had grown to the point that it should have been named a subfield of the discipline of anthropology (Baba 1986). In the 1990s, anthropologists increasingly took jobs in the non-academic sector without plans to return to academia (van Willigen 2002). Private sector anthropological work increased again during the 1980s for several reasons: (1) monies invested outside the country by private U.S. sources increased by a factor of four between 1974 to 1983 (Baba 1986); (2) foreign investment into the United States increased 400 percent (Baba 1986); (3) multinational corporations, usually owned by a homogeneous group, tended to create an atmosphere of ethnocentrism when dealing with a multicultural workforce, resulting in an inability to understand and react adequately when faced with cultural differences that affected work environs. Worse, companies would sometimes attempt to compel the supporting community to accept “inappropriate” practices, technologies, and/or products without focusing on the needs of the local population (Baba 1986). Companies came to realize that long-term business success depended on cultural education from anthropologists (Baba 1986).

Research in business and industrial anthropology began to concentrate in three areas: marketing and consumer behavior, organizational theory and culture, and international business (especially international marketing, intercultural management, and intercultural communication) (Baba 1986). Anthropology offered new insights into the effect of culture on consumption, and the meanings and functions of goods, including the

impact on status. In the area of organizational research, it helped to create awareness that corporations exist within a cultural framework (Baba 1986).

As a result, there was a resurgence of interest in qualitative methods and anthropologists. Other reasons for this included disappointment with traditional research methods and the recognition that qualitative methods made excellent diagnostic probes (Whyte 1978) especially during periods of rapid technological change (Baba 1986). Since anthropology was seen as the home of qualitative research (Baba 1986) and few university positions for anthropologists were available, the percentage of graduates working outside academia grew from 8 percent in 1971 to 34 percent in 1984 according to the Report on the 1984 Survey of Anthropology Ph.D.s, American Anthropological Association (in Baba 1986). In 1996, only 63 percent of the graduating doctorate earners could have found jobs in academia (Givens et al. 1997). More recently, as of 1997, 29 percent of graduating Ph.D.s found non-academic jobs. "Get some training in applied anthropology" was one of the top three suggestions from recent Ph.D.s.

Not surprisingly, ethnographic methods gained popularity outside of anthropology. These techniques started appearing as part of business school curricula. Anthropologists such as John Sherry, Grant McCracken, and Barbara Olsen began teaching at well-known universities like Northwestern, Harvard, and the State University of New York, Old Westbury (Jordan 2003).

An important partnership was formed in 1989 that still influences the practice of business anthropology; the collaboration forged the bond between anthropology and design (Wasson 2000). PARC and Chicago design firm Jay Doblin and Associates,

joined forces to work on the Workplace Project for Steelcase. Rick Robinson, holding a Ph.D. in human development, was the director of research at Doblin. Lucy Suchman, still at PARC, created the Work Practice and Technology Area with money granted for the project. She hired more researchers including sociolinguists and anthropologists Brigitte Jordan and Francoise Brun-Cottan; Jean Lave and sociologist Emanuel Schegloff acted as consultants (Reese 2002). PARC employed an ethnographic approach using video recordings of natural events and combining Vygotskian activity theory and ethnomethodology/conversation analysis (Wasson 2002).

One of the enduring aspects of the collaboration was the formation of a working partnership between anthropologists and designers, an alliance which helped Robinson create a methodology which borrowed heavily from the anthropological tradition (Reese 2002). Impressed with the value of using ethnographic methods, Rick Robinson started E-Lab, the first design-consulting firm devoted purely to the use of this methodology (Reese 2002). Christina Wasson was hired at E-Lab in 1996; she eventually returned to academia to educate other anthropologists in the E-Lab style of study (Wasson 2002). PARC received quite a lot of press exposure including articles in *The New York Times* – 1991; *Fast Company* – 1996 and 2004; *Technology Review* – 1998; and *The Industry Standard* – 2001.

E-Lab remains iconic in the minds of ethnographers. Its techniques for collaborative analysis continue to be seen throughout the business anthropology world. These include methodologies such as a shared project room (the Bocca room), Post-It notes grouping data bits into themes, and a curious process called “Turning the room,”

wherein the Post-It note constellation (and the working framework) is dismantled and the analysis process starts anew (LaBarre 1998). This approach can be seen in action in research institutions such as IBM Almaden Research, Institute for the Future, Sapien, and Jump Associates, to name a few.

When Xerox PARC management and researchers could not come to an agreement over the future direction of the group, the resulting diaspora effectively gutted the social science research effort at PARC, but provided the rest of the business anthropology community with a wealth of talent and experience (Baba 2006a). Jeanette Blomberg initially moved to Sapien, after it had acquired E-Lab and then to Service Practices group at the IBM Almaden Research Center. Françoise Brun-Cottan left and started her own consulting agency. Brigitte Jordan shifted to the Institute for Research on Learning (IRL), an offshoot of PARC. IRL served as another incubator for Suchman-inspired researchers such as Jean Lave, Etienne Wegner, Melissa Cefkin, and Pat Sachs.

Following on the heels of the success and recognition of PARC and E-Lab, numerous other consulting/research companies were formed. Other important ethnography-employing firms included IDEO, formed in 1991 from Moggridge Associates - London, ID Two (where Jane Fulton Suri worked) – San Francisco, and David Kelley Design (where Tom Kelley also worked) and Matrix Design – Palo Alto (Reese 2002, Kelley 2001). Another research company is SonicRim, founded by Liz Sanders, of Fitch, Inc (formerly Richardson/Smith), in 1999. She holds a Ph.D. in experimental and quantitative psychology and a BA in psychology and anthropology. Her methodology included a tool called Velcro modeling, which used Velcro covered

shapes that participants assembled into design possibilities for new products (Reese 2002). Also worth mentioning are Cheskin, formed in 1930s by Louis Cheskin (Cheskin 2008), which started using ethnography in the 1980s and Jump Associates started in 1998 by Dev Patnaik (Jump 2008).

In addition to the formation of researcher companies employing ethnographers, corporations began forming in-house research departments. These companies include Intel's People and Practices Research Group, which has had a strong impact on the field of design anthropology thanks to the work of researchers such as Ken Anderson, Genevieve Bell, and John Sherry. Its presence started with the hire of Tony Salvador as a Human Factors Design Engineer in 1993 after he received Ph.D. in Human Factors and Experimental Psychology (Perspective – Tony Salvador 2006). Soon after his hire, the People and Practices Research Group was formed. Psychologist Christina Riley (formerly with Bell Labs) assisted in its creation (Interview with Christine Riley 2006) and she went on to direct the group. Other examples of companies hiring staff anthropologists include Motorola – Susan Squires and Jean Canavan; Nissan – Steve Barnett; Nynex – Pat Sachs, GM – Elizabeth Briody and Marietta Baba; and Microsoft – Tracey Lovejoy and Nelle Steele.

In 2000, the Consortium of Applied and Practicing Anthropology Programs (COPAA) was formed (van Willigen 2002). The resulting network provided a means for disseminating information about applied anthropology programs to educators and prospective students.

### Recognition of the Praxis

Finally, in 2005, a conference was created to address the interests and concerns unique to anthropologists and other practitioners using ethnographic methods in the fields of business and industry. The Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference (EPIC) was co-sponsored by Ken Anderson, manager of the People and Practices Group at Intel and Tracey Lovejoy, Microsoft Corporation (Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference 2006 2006a), and held at Microsoft in Redmond, Washington. Its mission was to provide a forum for ethnographic practitioners to exchange research and other information, support participants in their growth as practitioners, expand the practice, look at challenges, promote awareness, and develop and maintain a record of the community through published proceedings (Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference 2005 2005). In its first year, 2005, over 200 people attended (Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Proceedings 2005). EPIC's importance lay in providing a forum for researchers situated in business and industrial workplaces who felt that their work had been ignored or unappreciated. EPIC 2005 was a formal acknowledgment of the value of their efforts (Society for Applied Anthropology 2005).

EPIC 2006 was held at Intel in Portland, Oregon (EPIC Corporate Support 2006b). Their welcome page offers, "We would like to invite you to the second Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference (EPIC). This conference brings together people who are actively thinking about the theoretical and methodological development of ethnography in industry practice. We want to draw participants who are both working in industry, as well as those who consult or collaborate with industry. We create a

collaborative venue where those practicing their ethnographic training in the corporate setting can benefit from mutual support and sharing of information” (Welcome to EPIC 2006 2006d). The number of attendees in 2006 increased to almost 300 (Ken Anderson, personal communication, November 28, 2006).

In addition to those influential ethnographer/anthropologists already mentioned, there is one more that deserves attention – Dr. Marietta Baba. Dr. Baba is currently the Dean of the College of Social Science and professor of anthropology at Michigan State University (Baba 2006b). While she was at Wayne State, she founded the Business and Industrial Anthropology Initiative. In addition to her doctorate in physical anthropology, she also holds a MBA from Michigan State University. She has written numerous publications including books and articles on applied anthropology, design anthropology, the history of applied anthropology, and the incorporation of theory into practice. She has conducted research at General Motors Corporation, the U.S. Air Force, Ford Motor Company, the City of Detroit, and has received many National Science Foundation grants (Baba 2006c).

## Chapter 4    The Uneven Path to Ethnography

Paul's interview takes place in his home. I am greeted at his front door by Paul and his new companion, a mostly grown, fifty-pound mutt. We enter into Paul's workspace and I am assaulted by the colors – the walls are each painted a vivid color. "This is my room," he explains. "I work alone. Collaborators and clients don't come here. Having someone here is a rare occasion. But I've decided just for pride to treat it similarly to a space that would be visible and part of that is coping with the psychology of working at home. You don't have normal display things in a home office. People don't come in and go, 'Oh wow, cool office.' It doesn't mean you work in your pajamas all day and don't shave. I think putting some of those out-of-home behaviors into a home office will help me just stave off some of the challenges in terms of isolation." He shows me around his office. It is full of bits and pieces – he has collected artifacts from around the world. Sometimes they are related to a project, more of a souvenir, and sometimes the item just caught his eye. Paul likes to engage people by telling stories and having odd items in his office allows him to story tell on the "rare occasions" when he has visitors. He also has a bookcase next to his desk full of books on design, marketing, innovation. He admits, "It's a little depressing. I haven't read nearly as much of this as I'd like." The overall impression of his home office is that of a museum. Perhaps it is because he has not lived in the house very long (about a year), but it feels more like the impression of an office rather than an actual workspace.

This chapter looks at the factors that led to an increase in the practice of business ethnography by those who come from traditions not commonly associated with the practice of ethnographic methods such as design, computer science, marketing, international relations, psychology, engineering, as well as others. Some of these factors include the concretizing of a mindset into a practice, the availability of training outside of academia, and the attraction of a career that was receiving media exposure and attention from employers.



### **Essentializing Anthropologists' Skill Set**

To get jobs in business, anthropologists had to create a resume that included a skills set: a simplification, a simulacrum, a schematization of their actual, somewhat intangible, worth and abilities. What anthropologists do and what they can contribute to an organization needed to be tangible to managers. That simplification allowed others with less extensive background, training in anthropology to adopt this distilled terminology, turn it into a methodology, and market themselves as para-anthropologists.

Darrah (1996), in his work within industrial factories, found that skill sets did not adequately describe the jobs workers performed. They failed to take into account the richness of the actual work. Descriptions did not allow for the situated learning inherent in any work environment. Bowker and Star (1999) added that invisible work and contingencies of practice make quantifications incomplete.

### **Learning Ethnography**

Very little can be found in the literature providing descriptions of the experience of anthropologists in what could be considered "traditional" anthropology programs. It is a topic discussed openly and informally by anthropologists, but as of yet has not been explored in print. However, the Center for Innovation in Research and Graduate Education (CIRGE) published the results of a study they conducted in 2005-2006 of doctorate recipients five to ten years after the granting of their degree (Rudd et al. 2008). Four hundred thirty-two anthropologists participated in the survey. Anthropology graduate students had the longest path to their degree of all the social science graduates, spending an average of 8.5 years in their program compared to that of communications

students with a mean of 5.5 years. Two questions arise regarding the implications of this longer time period. First, why does it take anthropologists longer than other social scientists to complete their graduate work? Does the difference lay in the curricula, in the candidates, or somewhere else? Is it the fieldwork that lengthens the time to completion? Second, are potential anthropologists aware that it takes longer to complete that degree? It is less clear what constitutes the curricula of most graduate programs and how much time is spent learning theory and methodology.

### Mentorships

Another means of learning ethnography is through association with a practitioner. Lucy Suchman and her work at PARC are examples of mentorship situations that have done much to form current researchers as well as future generations. With her application of ethnomethodology to the work of studying others, she influenced, both directly and indirectly, dozens of practitioners' work practice. Paul (E MS) is an example of a researcher trained in a mentorship. He "was given the opportunity to basically apprentice, although I had to do a lot of persuasion, you know. 'Let me join in the brainstorm, let me go hold the video camera, let me watch the tapes' and slowly I was able to work my way into that types of things. That's how apprenticing works. You sort of do that long enough and you get more and more responsibility and then develop and then become- you go from apprentice to journeyman, to master." He in turn passed on his training to others. He discussed preparing a presentation about ethnography to a group of designers. His goal was to explain the process of analysis, a step which he felt receive little attention. "I believe designers understand a lot about turning a lot of loose

information into something and that they don't think they know where that process starts so when I talk about doing research to designers, I felt like 'You guys get this better than you think' as opposed to people of a different orientation." As an example of creating a mentoring program, Doug (A MS) was part of a group at his work place which was discussing if they wanted to create a "very systematic approach to getting people up to speed very quickly on our methodology and methods." Their goal was to make praxis explicit.

### Books

There are a number of authors who have written books on methodology directed at various audiences. Texts such as Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology* (1995), Stewart's *The Ethnographer's Method* (1998), and the seven-volume collection on methodology edited by LeCompte and Schensul (1999) are geared more toward the academic reader. However, books like Fetterman's *Ethnography: Step by Step* (1998), Mariampolski's (2006) book, and Sunderland and Denny's *Doing Anthropology in Consumer Research* (2007) by are clearly targeted to a wider audience.

Other examples include the booklet, *An Ethnography Primer* published by Cheskin (2008), a market research company, in conjunction with the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA). It provided a definition and operationalized ethnography within the marketer-designers' context. The pamphlet explained, "Ethnography is a research method based on observing people in their natural environment rather than in a formal research setting," and "Ethnography informs design by revealing a deep understanding of

people and how they make sense of their world.” It also outlined “Steps in Ethnographic Research.”

### Self-training

Historically, anthropologists going into the field were not taught research methods. Bernard (1995) told how uncommon research methodology classes were during his anthropology instruction in the 1950s and 1960s. Agar (1996:54) related the University of California Berkeley folktale of a graduate student, preparing to go into the field, approached Alfred Kroeber for advice on how to do fieldwork. Kroeber responded, “I suggest you buy a notebook and pencil.” Nascent anthropologists did go with a background in theory and having extensively read other ethnographies.

However, it appears that even today anthropologists do not receive training in methodology. Jennifer (A PhD), who received her doctorate less than a decade ago, offered that during her graduate years, she received no training in ethnographic methods. “We were not trained in how to create an instrument. Surveys were frowned upon. There wasn't good training in applied anthropology. We were trained for something else. There was no technique to designing an instrument. We did open-ended interviews. I learned no systematic methodology. It worked for me. The point was not to develop systematized method. The point was to gather interesting data and come back and work on it.” Lueck (1997) discussed this attitude in a communication with J.A. English-Lueck: “[I]f a new ethnographer cannot figure out the profession on their own how can they expect to enter and comprehend a different culture?” The path to a doctorate is a trial by fire. English-Lueck disclosed that anthropology professors were reluctant to provide

explicit information about field techniques fearing they might possibly bias the graduate student toward their own mindset.

However, Lueck's work on ethnographic interviewing concluded that anchor-guided training – training which includes simulated activities and expert-guided discussions – in ethnographic methods yielded richer data than did the traditional apprentice-like style instruction. In other words, by using a more explicit approach to training, interviewers were able to achieve a higher number of objectives in the areas of active listening and using probes. Chapter six provides additional discussion of the role of the apprentice model as a component of identity formation.

The question to consider is, if anthropologists are, for the most part, not methodologically trained, how do they differ from others who wish to practice ethnography without training? Anthropologists see a definitive difference. Grant McCracken speaking of those who lack formal training and/or apprenticeship suggested, "For their next act of imposture, why not pose as a self-trained engineer?" (2006b:2).

It could be argued that anthropologists are excellent examples of self-trained professionals. Jane Goodall did not have a conventional education in anthropology (Goodall, 1988). After high school, she had the good fortune to become a secretary for L.S.B. Leakey in Nairobi. She accompanied Dr. Leakey and his wife, Mary, on a dig in the Serengeti plains. With this fieldwork under her belt, Dr. Leakey offered her the chance to study chimpanzees near Lake Tanganyika. So her career was born. She had had the advantage of apprenticeship with a well-known physical anthropologist, but had no formal advanced degree.

Michael (ECE PhD) could be considered an example of a self-trained ethnographer. He was exposed briefly to ethnography in graduate school via the work of a professor. Later, when he started working as a manager at his research company, he realized that ethnographic methods would work to address the research problem with which he was tasked. After conversations with others who “did have experience doing this kind of stuff” on the mechanics of taping behaviors, he sent his team, who were mostly trained in the area of human computer interface, into the field “Over time, we've had other kinds of folks go, with more human factors backgrounds, psychology backgrounds. But I've never had any of the folks on the team who were real ethnographers doing this particular piece of work.”

Goodall and Michael had the good fortune to participate in communities of practice. Goodall's apprenticeship with Leakey and Michael's conversations with ethnographers allowed them to engage in situated learning, especially in the case of Goodall, who experienced legitimate peripheral participation in anthropology in her job as Leakey's secretary. Lave and Wenger (2003) have done a great deal of work on a type of self-training known as situated learning which occurs in communities of practice (COPs) that imbue the participant with the knowledge and *habitus* of a full-fledged member. Goodall's COP was Leakey, Mary Leakey, and students. Michael's COP was the ethnographers with whom he interfaced and his subordinate researchers. Their COPs were very different and so were their products.

## **Ethnography is Sexy**

Tracey Lovejoy, a master's-level anthropologist who works at Microsoft, has said, "ethnography is sexy in the corporate world" (Fitzgerald 2005). In Chapter three, reasons were given as to why employers found ethnographic methods and those who practice them a desirable commodity. There are also indications that the employers do not always understand what that commodity is and what it provides. Comments like "it's charming" and "that 'ethno' thing" reveal a certain whimsy associated with ethnography. It begs the question of what this attitude could do to a profession where not all practitioners are firmly rooted in a methodological and theoretical tradition.

### Media Exposure

Mention of ethnography and anthropologists began to appear in popular press publications and media with intriguing headlines such as "Indiana Jones is going corporate: Anthropologists take on consumers" (Becker 2003), "Bill Gates as anthropologist" (Brown 2005), and "Anthropologists go native in the corporate village" (Kane 1996). Publications that printed articles about ethnography/anthropology in business included *Technology Review*, *Business Week*, *Chicago Sun Times*, the *New York Times*, *PC Magazine*, and *Fast Company*.

One instance of ethnography's increasing renown is the story, set in the early 2000s. An AM radio station in the San Francisco Bay Area hosted a career consultant who spoke about unusual careers. He told the story of an anthropologist who had studied fisherman in Alaska and found that they would duct tape a laptop to the side of a building near where their boats docked so they could record their catches. He took his data back

to his electronics firm and as a result, the company developed computers capable of withstanding extreme temperatures. He offered the story as an example of taking a profession with an established career path and recasting it to suit personal interests. Later, I found that the anthropologist was John Sherry of Intel. The study was a part of the Anywhere at Work project that he conducted with Tony Salvador, also with Intel. It was nicknamed “Fish and Chips” (Kupfer 2000).

Others, practicing ethnography, or what is assumed to be ethnographic-like, have gained notoriety among other researchers (for good or bad) and the press. Paco Underhill is a researcher and the CEO of Envirosell, a behavioral market research firm. He has made a name for himself with his unique market research techniques. He sends his team of investigators into stores to track shoppers, videotaping behaviors, and take notes, all done covertly. He has been called the “Margaret Mead of shopping” (Underhill 2004:back cover) presumably because he hangs out with the natives in their own environment. He adapted the work of anthropologist William Whyte who used time-lapse photography to capture pedestrian movement patterns in public spaces (Gladwell 1996). His reputation comes from naming phenomena such as the “butt-brush factor,” the tendency of women to leave areas in which they feel physically impinged, and discerning that consumer traffic invariably flows to the right as it moves through a store (Underhill 1999). Underhill’s academic training was at Vassar, where he received a bachelor’s degree in an independent major, futuristics (Embry Medina 2006). He has published three books (Amazon 2008), and been translated into twenty-six languages



(Envirosell 2008b). His company has offices in New York, Italy, Brazil, Japan, Mexico, India, and Russia (Envirosell 2008a).

A local technology executive contacted the anthropology department at San José State University to enlist the work of graduate students in performing “shopping anthropology” in a local electronics megamart to study shoppers’ reactions to a new type of interactive display. He asked us to do work “like Paco Underhill,” of whom, at that point, I had never heard. My client hoped to have us covertly observe people, noting their response. We convinced him that covert work was outside the ethical boundaries for anthropologists and we came to an agreement about how to conduct the research. Ironically, for the analysis, we did not find Underhill’s work especially relevant.

Clotaire Rapaille is probably best known for research leading to the design of Chrysler’s PT Cruiser and to a particularly poignant Folgers Coffee commercial involving a young soldier coming home and waking his family with the smell of coffee brewing (National Public Radio 2004). He has also helped market the Hummer SUV, coffee in Japan, and French cheese in the United States (National Public Radio 2004). He claims to work with fifty of the firms in the Fortune 100 (Archetype Discoveries Worldwide 2008). He holds master’s degrees in psychology and political science and a doctorate in medical anthropology from the Université de Paris, Sorbonne (Archetype Discoveries Worldwide 2008). His research technique consists of focus-group-type encounters during which he elicits “reptilian” responses to the product in question. His philosophy is that the reptilian mind – the source of base desires such as sex, food, safety – always outweighs rational thought. He has been decried by Richard A. Shweder, a

professor of both anthropology and psychology at the University of Chicago, for practicing the “soft porn of irrationalism.” Rapaille has denounced academics because “they have only ideas. They don’t have any results” (Sacks 2006). He has come under fire from other anthropologists such as Grant McCracken who noted that there are only so many Jungian archetypes (such as Rapaille employs) and that eventually, he would need to recycle them, destroying the uniqueness of his findings. He envisioned Rapaille standing in front of a dartboard of archetypes to determine which he will bestow to a client (McCracken 2006a).

In addition to individuals gaining fame, companies have had their share of media attention as well. IDEO has been involved in the design of numerous items such as the Palm V and Handspring Treo, Zyliss kitchen tools, the “Keep the Change” program for Bank of America (IDEO 2008), and one of the Swiffer models (Pethokoukis 2006). It has been written about in *U.S. News and World Report* (Pethokoukis 2006), *Business Week* (Nussbaum 2004), and *The New York Times* (Chamberlain 2006). As was discussed in Chapter three, ex-Xerox PARC researcher Lucy Suchman (2007), continues to refute the stubbornly iconic story of having been responsible for the “big green button” on Xerox copy machines that has become part of the PARC mythology.

Revealing the stories behind product creation is another way that ethnography has become more acknowledged. One example is how the yogurt snack Go-Gurt was created. In 1997, General Mills contacted GVO, a Bay Area design firm, to research breakfast habits. After hearing what mothers had to say about breakfast via a focus group, Susan Squires and a designer spent time with families during their mornings.

They found that although mothers would report serving their children healthy morning meals, the actual time period was chaotic as everyone prepared to leave for their day. They found the banana to be a ubiquitous food, fast, easy, filling, and recommended the cereal company develop something like a banana that was nutritious and could be eaten on the go. The result was Go-Gurt – yogurt in a tube that could be eaten refrigerated or frozen (National Association for the Practice of Anthropology 2008). The product generated \$37 million its first year on the market (Squires 2002).

A recent illustration is the use of anthropologists by Microsoft to help develop the new Vista operating system. Vista is the latest incarnation of one of the world's most popular softwares. Bill Gates has touted it as, "the key to its era" (Gruener 2007). One of the project's anthropologists, Tracey Lovejoy, explained that she "did a lot of work looking at how people work with files" which ultimately led to a new conceptualization of the operating system's electronic file structure (Johnson 2006).

### **How Participant Anthropologists Ended Up in Business**

How did the practitioners in this study come to use ethnographic methods for business research? For many it was part of their academic education. Most anthropologists are exposed to the idea of producing ethnographies, indeed read a great many in graduate school, but may not be formally trained in methodology, as in the case of Jennifer and Andrew, but learn methods in the field. However, how they went from academia to the business world is worth exploring.

As a graduate student, a friend with a transcription business asked Jennifer (A PhD) to transcribe tapes from interviews held by an ethnographic research firm. Jennifer

didn't realize such companies existed and was fascinated by what she heard. She later found out a friend was working for the same company and arranged a job interview through her. She was offered a position and has been there since. For Andrew (ECA ABD) it started in graduate school. "I put myself through school with grants from Annenberg and IBM." His grants involved looking at faculty computer usage. "It was all very applied and non-anthropology. In fact, the department didn't even consider it anthropology." However, the project trained him to communicate to technologists, so that he could understand their world and they could understand social science, "How to talk about social science findings to those who have no clue." Sandra (A PhD) went from teaching, which she found boring, to educational evaluation where she met a design researcher. From there she went to a research firm and her career as a business anthropologist was born. Doug (A MS) was always interested in application. While teaching computer classes, he became interested at the intersection of culture and technology and began looking into industrial design. He eventually took at job a "horrible" design firm to gain experience. He went on to work for companies with which he had a much better experience.

### **How Other Practitioners Ended Up Using Ethnographic Methods**

For most of the participants with other backgrounds, their introduction to ethnography was through their job. Paul (E MS) learned ethnography at work by shadowing colleagues who were using ethnographic methods. In a case of both participant observation and situated learning, he made himself useful to them and self-created a mentored position. Franco (E MA) was also taught about ethnographic methods

on the job in a less focused manner. However, two of the “ethnographers” discovered it explicitly in graduate school. Matthew (E PhD) learned about ethnography in his graduate program and apprenticed with his advisor. Sarah’s (E MA) background was design. She went back to school to get more education after being laid off from a marketing communications firm. Her graduate research study, the capstone of her graduate education, required an ethnographic study. One participant needed no training because she (Charlene (E PhD)) felt she had an intuitive grasp of the methodology and was using it before she knew it had a name. How ethnography is learned will be discussed at greater length in Chapter five.

## Chapter 5     Anthropologists' Position in Time and Space

I meet with Sandra in a cafeteria on the campus of the company for whom she's currently working. I'm a little nervous. Sandra has a long, impressive history as a researcher. We've only met briefly before and I'm concerned about how the interview will flow. She brings along a coworker, another Ph.D., who works with her. The additional stranger does not help my anxiety. We order our meals (all salads) and find a seat. It's noisy in here, but it's starting to clear out and by the time we're ready to talk seriously, it's much quieter. I start the interview by asking what is she doing here, but she redirects it slightly. "What am I doing? Here's what I hope that I'm doing, which is helping to frame the research and the activities within this project. Another kind of frame than people would typically use. It's not the frame of tasks to be done. It's not the frame of the time, a project moving along in space in time. I'm trying to bring an anthropological frame. Everybody has sets of cultures and assumptions about the world and understandings about the world and yet they're framed in the larger culture that they come from. They bring those understandings, the reinforcing them, making a culture. It's a culture that's defined by their discipline." I sit back and smile to myself. This interview will go just fine.

Business/industrial/organizational/design anthropologists and ethnographers have found themselves holding contested positions. Business anthropologists often decried the pity (at best) and criticism (at worst) that they have experienced from their academic counterparts. Unfortunately, they enact similar treatment toward those practicing ethnography outside the practice of anthropology. In this chapter, I look at the tension between academic and non-academic anthropologists and between business anthropologists and ethnographers from non-anthropology backgrounds, discuss the roots of the discord, how applied practitioners suffer from a lack of support from professional organizations, look at the factors leading to and the effects of boundary maintenance and

hypothesize how these variables contribute to the way anthropologists interact with ethnographers.

How many anthropologists actually work outside of academia? There is a belief within anthropology that it is extremely difficult, even for Ph.D. holders, to find jobs at universities. Certainly, there have been years in which that has been true. However, since 1997, the overwhelming majority of doctoral anthropologists found work within the academy. According to the American Anthropological Association's 1997 AAA Survey of Anthropology Ph.D.s (N=163), that year, 29 percent of the new conferees who found work, took nonacademic positions (Givens et al. 1997). The Center for Innovation and Research in Graduate Education (CIRGE) at The University of Washington, Seattle conducted a larger study from 2005 to 2006. From their respondents, they concluded that 22.4 percent of doctorate holders, five or more years after earning their degrees, worked in non-academic arenas (N = 371).

### **Academic and Applied Anthropology**

Since over 75 percent of anthropologists work within the bounds of universities, non-academic anthropologists are a minority both numerically and politically. Marietta Baba attempted to explain the history of the hegemony of academic anthropologists. The term "applied anthropology" has been used in only two periods and locales – in Britain during the colonial era and in the United States, dating from before World War II up to today (Baba 2005). The roots for the phrase can be found in England. During the British colonial period, senior anthropologists would divide projects and assign the applied work to the apprentice or "second-tier" workers. The theoretical work was left for the "Big

Man” anthropologist (Baba 2005). Ironically, the theoretical work was possible because of the expressly applied colonial research. As the overt colonial period drew closed, the term ‘applied anthropology’, associated with all that the ‘Empire’ stood for, was discarded as a distasteful reminder of anthropology’s alliance with oppression (Baba 2005).

Bronislaw Malinowski, attempting to close the divide wrote, “Unfortunately, there is still a strong but erroneous opinion in some circles that practical anthropology is fundamentally different from theoretical or academic anthropology. The truth is that science begins with application...” (1945:5). Van Willigen (2002) echoed his thesis, asserting that applied anthropology contributed much of the foundation of the discipline.

Ironically, when Lucy Mair began her Ph.D. work at the London School of Economics, Malinowski told her that because of her inexperience with anthropology, he would not allow her to do the “standard type” of fieldwork. Rather, he sent her to study social change. Years later, she commented, “Nobody today regards the study of social change as an occupation for the half-baked” (Mair 1969:8). At that point, even Malinowski, proponent of practical anthropology, drew boundaries around what was appropriate fieldwork.

Chapter three discussed how, in the United States, the relationship between anthropologists and academic and non-academic careers has waxed and waned, depending on political and economic factors (when universities are hiring, anthropologists tend to work at universities. When they are not, they favor non-academic positions). While there is much anecdotal evidence from practitioners and second party



accounts of what they have experienced and/or surmised regarding the attitude of academic anthropologists toward their non-academic brethren, there is little in writing from disapproving academics. The examples from practitioners are plentiful such as Bennett (1996) who stated that applied anthropology was “viewed by scholars with ambivalence or even contempt.” In an National Public Radio piece on British design anthropologist Stokes Jones (2004), journalist Eric Weiner summarized how although Jones has been criticized by unnamed other anthropologists for “selling out,” Jones remained unaffected. Foreshadowing stories below, Shore and Wright (1997) described how non-academic anthropologists lose their status as “real” anthropologist in the eyes of their academic kindred.

Professor and consultant Tom Davenport, in a Harvard Business School forum entry (2007), advocated the greater use of corporate anthropology. He noted that professors (presumably anthropology) and universities continued to discount the use of anthropology in business and it is this attitude that restricted the growth of the field. Barbara (A PhD) felt that the discipline “fostered this idea that it would be surprising to find an anthropologist in the corporate world.” It was her opinion that anthropology was continually “discovered” as a viable business tool, “as opposed to people trying to understand it in some new context potentially, or a new set of relationships.”

In a private conversation, Beryl, another doctorate-holding anthropologist practitioner alleged, “The academic side of the house hasn't taken practice very serious. In disciplines where practice is taken seriously, the theorists worry about practice. In anthropology if you talk to a theorist about practice, they think you mean practice theory,

not practice practice. Theory thinks practice is a second rate activity.” In her opinion, theory was the easier activity. It entailed less accountability. “A practitioner has to deliver something to a client. If it doesn't work, you’re held accountable. That's very difficult when you're dealing with ideas from the realm of culture.”

Sandra (A PhD) talked about working with another group of professionals which she noticed had similar disparities between their theoretical and applied branches. In explaining what she had observed she echoed Williams (2006) by tracing the conflict back to the Enlightenment period when monks and monasteries were the controllers of knowledge. Sequestered, they were freed from common dealings to spend their time thinking and writing – engaging in “pure thought, platonic thought.” Those that chose to leave the sanctity of the monastery to work outside of its walls were looked on as inferior for dealing with the unclean. From these beginnings came the university system in Europe that spread East and West and the chasm that still exists between applied and academic branches of disciplines.

She theorizes that the roots of the conflict are fear and the culture of the discipline, “There's this whole idea in anthropology that we have these really great methods with some power to them. If we use them, we could do harm - that's the academic. Or it could be used for good - that's the applied approach [laughter].” She sees academic anthropologists as holding back this “sacred knowledge” and applying it judiciously to avoid potential scandals. Similarly, Herskovits (1936) cautioned that although anthropologists could provide information valuable to the humane treatment of “primitive people,” the possibility existed for abuse of “natives” based on insider

knowledge. In Sandra's opinion, this sentiment/belief goes so deep that those who use ethnography outside of academic constraints become tainted. Even their work is held suspect. "The evil business. I have been accused of having been brought over to the dark side."

There is some rationale behind the academy's perspective. Over the past fifty years, several spectacularly controversial studies have been held under the magnifying glass of public opinion. Besides Project Camelot and the Vietnam debacle (see Chapter three), there have been numerous other examples of collusion between anthropologists and the military (see Price 2000). A lesser known instance was one in which the AAA (without the knowledge of its membership) gave the CIA the association's roster with information about each member's area of expertise and linguistic abilities (Price 2000). One of the best-known fracas involved the accusations made by Patrick Tierney in his book, *Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon* (2000). He alleged that the work of Napoleon Chagnon and James Neel with the Yanomami Indians in South America was tainted by flagrant ethical misconduct. Despite the vilification of Neel and Chagnon by several academic societies (including The National Academy of Sciences, The American Society of Human Genetics, and the Society for Visual Anthropology), an investigation by the American Anthropological Association found the researchers failed to obtain adequate informed consent, portrayed the Yanomami in a potentially damaging manner, psychologically harmed the participants, and maintained involvement with morally suspect Venezuelan politicians (Gregor and Gross 2004).

Another example is the infamous work of Laud Humphreys, who, although a doctoral candidate working on his sociology Ph.D. at the time of his research, nonetheless sent shockwaves rippling through the social science community when he conducted research on homosexual encounters without identifying himself as a researcher. He then later tracked down participants and interviewed them while posing as a health researcher (Warwick 1973). Taking the view of the academic anthropologist, one could argue that if these types of studies, which generated scrutiny of the discipline both from within and without, could take place under academic auspices, what further damage could occur without academic oversight?

These attitudes toward applied work and the people who practice it coincide with Mary Douglas' classificatory system and the meaning of pure and impure. Shore and Wright, extrapolated Douglas' work and applied it to the academic/applied rift, suggested that applied work is seen as impure and more emphatically, polluting to the academy (1997). If as Douglas postulates, "The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship" (1984:3), then academic anthropologists, can be seen as attempting to shepherd their wayward applied brethren back into the fold. Further, if non-academic anthropologists will not make their way back, then, "It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created" (Douglas 1984:4). To rephrase, 'you are either with us, or you are against (and inferior to) us.'

If applied anthropologists are to be found somewhere below academic anthropologists on a moral scale, then anthropologists who work for the government,

especially the military or intelligence gathering agencies are even lower down the ethical staircase. Doug (A MS) related, “An academic anthropologist, Ph.D. anthropologist, told me that if you work for the CIA, you’re not an anthropologist anymore.” Beryl (A PhD) shared that, “My next book will be to explain the methodology [of praxis]. I’m worried because the place where it developed was the military and most anthropologists think it's evil to work there. I'm hesitant to publish it for fear of being rejected out of hand.”

In 1919, Franz Boas wrote a letter to *The Nation* decrying the decision of some anthropologists to use their positions in the field as cover for covert activities (Boas 1919). However, at that time, his position was not a majority perspective and he was censured by the American Anthropological Association for his letter (Price 2000). The relationship between anthropology and the military has remained conflicted (Thomas 2003), most recently evidenced by the discussion over the Human Terrain System (HTS). The Pentagon stated that it hoped to use anthropologists and other social scientists to help see the situation in Iraq “from a human perspective, from a social scientist’s perspective” (Rohde 2007). Some anthropologists, including Hugh Gusterson and Roberto Gonzalez, remain skeptical about the actual motives of the project and have condemned the program. They, along with other anthropologists created an online pledge to support a boycott of this type of work for the military (Rohde 2007).

Previous to the HTS showdown, Doug (A MS) had been hopeful. “It's changing slowly, but I find that the cultural norm of anthropology is very conservative and very insular. And it's very hostile in my experience, to applied work.” To his way of thinking, the demarcation between what does and does not constitute appropriate anthropological

work puts the entire discipline in jeopardy of losing its status as a science. “What I mean is, if you think you have a science, but because it's not being used under your belief system, then it's not [a science], it's an ideology. So anthropology for the CIA, DuPont, academia, it's anthropology. Whether you like what it's being used for is immaterial to the cause because it either is something or it's not.”

Despite the disapproval of academics and the “danger” of working outside of academia’s safety net, anthropologist participants found real value in their work. Barbara (A PhD) offers that working within business gave researchers access they would not otherwise enjoy, “Part of what we trade on when we study down is we have power. That power gives us access. Without that power, how do we get access? That can be very difficult. That's one of the reasons why being inside the corporation gives you access that you wouldn't have on the outside.” She adds that entre was especially important for anthropologists whose methods require a higher level of intimacy. “The thing is, I don't know too many people who are in academia pushing the envelope...”

Jennifer (A PhD) feels that academia could also gain by exploiting applied practitioners, because “anthropologists who remain exclusively theoretical run the risk of becoming judgmental.” She is not hopeful about an alliance as she feels that the walls between the two arenas are too thick and unbridgeable.

Beryl (A PhD) states that working inside business, industry, and even the military had a moral imperative. She feels strongly that people working within these institutions were still people and may even be “our relatives.” She observes that in parts of the country, there is little choice about where to work and the working conditions can be

“horrendous.” “So if you care about people and where they work, and try to make the workplace better, I don’t see how you can cross out whole segments of the population because you think you’re better than they are.” She adds that, “And it isn’t that anything happens there that really unethical, it’s that they’re choosing parts of the world and calling them evil. I think that that’s just the height of backwards thinking in a discipline like anthropology. I can see not studying a torture organization, but not studying a business? When the most distinct form of organization in the U.S. is business? How can you not study it? It’s a complete abandonment of what we’re supposed to be doing, what society has entrusted us to do, and the stewardship that we have in this profession.” She goes on to challenge the discipline, “Practitioners need legitimization.”

One of the ways that anthropologists could gain credibility is through association with professional associations. Unfortunately, since most anthropologists work for colleges and universities professional organizations tend to represent academics. As Beryl declares above, it remains a source of frustration for practicing anthropologists, who experience deeply the lack of support, especially in terms of ethical guidelines. Curtis (A MA) shares, “When I look at some of the ethics and professional responsibility, from the SFAA or AAA, I don’t feel like they’re written with thoughts of people who are actually practicing. It’s such a high ideal that it’s some sort of contradiction. I take it very seriously, but it’s really hard.” Others have abandoned the possibility of ethical guidance from a professional organization, at least as exemplified by the AAA. Doug (A MS) revealed that, “I quit AAA. I’m still not a member because I think the code of ethics, at the time I thought it was an incredibly naïve document. It was used as ‘Can you

be censured for this, for that?’ as opposed to what I think would be really valuable which is a way to talk about these things and work out what are your personal set ethics. My ethics certainly trump the AAAs. My personal moral code trumps theirs.”

Still, anthropologists look for some type of professional affiliation and guidance. In a recent blog entry, anthropologist Mark Dawson wrote, “the American Anthropological Association is rapidly becoming (already has become?) irrelevant to and un-supportive of the needs of anthropologists working in corporate, military, and other contexts where the methods are used as part of a deep, day-to-day hands-on practice (Dawson 2008).” He continued on to suggest that an alternative organization be created to meet the needs of practitioners. Furthermore, a professional organization could have the ability to establish credibility of all practitioners, not just anthropologists. Sillitoe (2003) suggested that if anthropological professional associations created an identity for non-academic practitioners, it would inhibit “the poorly qualified” from claiming anthropologist status.

Despite their feelings toward academia’s reaction to them, many of the anthropologist participants have connections to universities. Barbara (A PhD) spoke of her work to create ties between her company and academic institutions, enabling them to work together on research projects. At the time of our interview, she had substantive connections with three major universities. Jennifer (A PhD) frequently works on projects with an anthropology professor at a nearby university. Lara (A PhD), at the time of her interview, was working as a lecturer at a state university. Only time will tell if these connections act to sooth the tension between the two groups of anthropologists.



Ethnographers from other disciplines do not seem to suffer the same sense of abandonment from their academic relatives. None of them mentioned any instances of feeling snubbed by academics. Burt (E PhD) holds a university position as well as working as a consultant. Franco (E MA) collaborates with academic anthropologists on projects. Charlene (E PhD) was part of a university-sponsored socioeconomic collaboration. No one spoke of any ill will he or she had experienced from academics in their respective fields.

### **Tension between Practitioners**

Whereas the boundary between academic and non-academic anthropologists is established as a question of ethical practices, the boundary between business anthropologists and ethnographers from other disciplines almost always distills to a questioning of qualification. Anthropologists are not averse to calling out those they feel do not live up to standard. Anthropologist Grant McCracken, Ph.D., in his keynote address at the EPIC 2006 conference offered that, “My profession has a problem. It is awash in hacks and pretenders. I am guessing that one in three ethnographers is more or less competent” (McCracken 2006b:2). He also unapologetically stated, “There has to be a way to separate the sheep from the goats, and we have to do it fast. Commercial ethnography could easily go the way of the focus group” (2006b:1).

Twyla (A PhD), an Anthrodesign contributor, who works both within industry and as a professor at a major Midwest university anthropology department, attempted to clarify anthropologists’ concerns, “There is always a perception that discussions around ethnographic knowledge and standards are about the ‘gatekeeping’ of others (with social

science degrees) out of the activity of ethnography. While there is a certain amount of competition over jobs that lends a reality to that idea, what is more at stake is the value of ethnography, regardless of who is practicing it.”

Anthropologist participants discuss their specific concerns. During his interview, Doug (A MS) mentions, but is unwilling to name, “incompetent” ethnographers who had hurt the field. Lara (A PhD) is concerned about untrained researchers entering the field as ethnographers and reducing ethnography to “something shallow.” Jennifer (A PhD) is a little more gracious when she talks about a recent project that had been led by a non-anthropologist, master’s-degree holding colleague. Since he was in charge, she had been reluctant to “step on his toes.” She found that his conclusions had been where she would have started her analysis: “It’s such basic anthropology. [It’s] not that exciting to me.” However, she admits the audience found the results novel and interesting and that she saw its value from their perspective. Marcel also decried the lack of theoretical grounding, “They have a background in organizational development and they look at the work force. They may find the same things, but they don’t view them through a theoretical lens.”

More generally, Tanya (A PhD), wanted to draw a line between the practice of ethnography and the ethnographer. “A psychologist or engineer engaged in participant observation, in store research of shoppers, or day in the life observations is not an ethnographer unless they also have formal or informal training in the field of anthropology. People who do ethnography are not necessarily ethnographers, as we have

learned over the last decade.” For her, the title of ethnographer was reserved for the anthropologist.

Employer Lawrence (PhD) worried about a hypothetical researcher, who would represent himself as an ethnographer and might be assumed to be an anthropologist, but would lack the appropriate training. He wondered if they might have a deleterious impact on not only ethnography as a field, but also on anthropology.

For practitioners, reputation equals power. In a *Business Week* design blog Larry Keeley, co-founder and president of the Doblin Group in Chicago, was quoted, “If you just use anthropologists, you can triple your innovation effectiveness by three times.” The blogger went on, “Think of that for a moment. That's probably why corporations are hiring so many cultural anthropologists” (Nussbaum 2005). Keeley mentioned anthropologists, not ethnographers. Credibility creates power which anthropologist ethnographers possess more of than to ethnographers from other backgrounds. This is different from the type of power that academic anthropologists wield over non-academic anthropologists. In the first case, if anthropologists and ethnographers were competing for the same job, reputation could help an uncertain employer make a hiring decision. It is unclear how much academic anthropologists could affect business anthropologists as their self-imposed isolation from the business community virtually assures they have no influence in that arena.

Ethnographers are sensitized to the perception that anthropologists are most closely associated with the practice of ethnography and they sometime find it daunting. Paul (E MS) points out “If you see a design ad where this work is talked about, it's talked

about as anthropology. It's talked about in a way that excludes others.” He continues on, discussing his uncertainty regarding his relationship to the Anthrodesign network. “It's sort of a weird thing, in that online community, I'm not sure of what my place is. I feel a little like an outsider and, you know, there's value to feeling that way, but I... So I'm always sort of looking to see what's gonna happen and being a little more cautious about... 'Cause I haven't read Goffman.”

Other than feelings of discomfort, ethnographers were surprisingly accepting of anthropologists, offering little in the way of concrete or abstract criticism of practitioners or the field. The strongest critical comment came from doctoral anthropologist Tanya, who said, “Anthropologists don't have training in things like effecting change; we are observers... In design anthropology you are always told to solve a problem and an anthropologist could look at a problem and say, ‘Don't solve it; wait and see what happens.’”

There were signs that anthropology is not as relevant as employers and practitioners would like. Ethnographer Franco (MA) was told by people at one of the Bay Area's major design companies that they were going to start hiring people with a background in ethnography, but not a deep educational background in anthropology because of inability to suspend the discipline when necessary.

### **Identity Protection**

#### Boundary Maintenance

Adding to the tension, no doubt, is that the boundaries of anthropology have never been easily delineated (Stocking 1995). Stocking attributes the 1983 reorganization of

the American Anthropological Association as contributing to the confusion when it attempted to differentiate itself to make room for all of the “adjectival anthropologies” that had surfaced since the 1960s. As far as anthropologists are concerned, lack of boundaries is not necessarily a bad thing as it allows flexibility.

However, it can be difficult to determine who and what constitutes an anthropologist. For Robert, a Ph.D. cultural anthropologist, in an Anthrodesign post, anthropologists are what they do. He suggests if there were an easy answer, it would be possible to test for “true” anthropologists. So instead, he defines “anthropological thinking” as “A combination of theory and method. The method is easy -- it's what gets appropriated first in the (business) circles I run in these days.” He finds that it is easy for business people to accept that in order to understand others, a researcher must occupy space with them, ranging from meeting face-to-face in a non-focus-group setting, to something close to total immersion.

What he feels is more difficult to conceptualize is “The bridge between this method and the theory” and the ideas of “holism and context.” By using participant observation to look at the varied and complex parts of human existence, one gains an understanding not available via focus groups. Theory provides a way to make sense of the data. “Some version of the culture concept would seem to be pretty important -- thinking that there are shared frameworks that generate differences between and commonalities within groups of people” in addition to the other concepts commonly found in anthropology: semiotics, sociality, social structure, power, and inequity. “So somebody who thinks like an anthropologist, who has the soul of an anthropologist,

would be someone who constantly, compulsively, looks at the world as a participant-observer, analyzing human behavior through the prism of the kinds of concepts I've mentioned."

Robert describes a life in which the distinction between individual and anthropologist are no longer distinct. For participants Jennifer and Sandra their answer to the question of "Who are you?" is inextricably bound to their status as doctoral anthropologists. Jennifer stated her concept of identity succinctly, "My professional identity is very wrapped up with being an anthropologist, and I feel authorized to say that because I have a Ph.D." She says that she always introduces herself as a cultural anthropologist.

Sandra (A PhD) gives an example of the working of a contextual identity. In response to the question, "What do you call yourself when you're not affiliated with a specific institution?" She answers, "Anthropologist. I've stopped trying to qualify it. I talked to someone else the other day about design anthropologist, business anthropologist, ethnographer. In the end, I'm an anthropologist applying the theories and methods of anthropology in a particular sector. That's what I do. That also makes it a little more fluid for me to frame what I do and think about what I do. So I can say, 'Hey, I'm gonna work on this super computer project.'" Sandra made full use of the flexibility of changing identity within the context of her current work.

It appears that Ph.D.-holding anthropologists have no problem identifying themselves as anthropologists. However, do M.A. anthropologists have that right? Curtis (A MA) would answer, "No." In addition to his advanced degree, he has

performed ethnographic work for major European food producers. Nonetheless, he did not think of himself as an anthropologist until he started his doctoral work in a field other than anthropology. His peers consider his background in anthropology qualification enough. However, when I ask him for his title, it was not anthropologist, it was Ph.D. Student.

For ethnographers, there is less certainty about how to classify themselves. Some, like Burt, agree with Robert's (A PhD) assertions. Burt (E PhD) is not a sociologist by degree. Rather, he graduated with a doctorate in organizational studies. Still, he has practiced, taught, and published for the last twenty years as a sociologist. In his mind, "You are what you do." On the other hand, Charlene (E PhD) would not consider herself an ethnographer until she had what she felt was enough experience to justify it, including working with an anthropologist in a consultancy and work with an educational research firm.

When I asked ethnographer Matthew (PhD) his title, he responds, "Consultant. I mean, it depends on who you're talking to and what the context is, but I use the word 'consultant' a lot, rather than 'ethnographer' or 'researcher' or whatever. I think that describes it more." He is not completely comfortable with the title and he acknowledges that categorizing his work is difficult. The difficulty in classifying the work is also discussed by Paul (E MS) who feels that it has too many labels and lacks a consistent name, "Product design, industrial design, and software design, usability, human computer interaction, whatever labels... There's thirty-eight labels that go on there as well, too."

### The Formation of Professional Identity

The road to obtaining a Ph.D. can be equated to a rite of passage as theorized by Victor Turner (1967). Turner identified these rites as a means of explaining the process or ritual of transition between socio and/or somatic states, such as between childhood and adulthood or nonmember to member. The rites consist of three phases: separation, marginalization (or liminalization), and aggregation. The rite starts with the candidate being separated, usually symbolically but sometimes physically, from her or his society. He or she is kept in this state of non-being for a period of time, during which the changes to his or her identity occur. The candidate is then reintroduced into the larger group with new status.

Consider the similarity of the anthropology graduate student experience to the marginalization period as denoted by Turner (1967). The liminal (the identity formation) period is denoted by:

- Real or symbolic invisibility of the candidate. Physically, they exist in a different space than the rest of their community. For a graduate student, this begins with, usually, the separation from family and relocation to living quarters close to the university. In later stages, and perhaps more significantly, for the anthropology graduate student, this involves moving to a field site, often for a period from six months to one year.
- No status, no classification. Turner identifies the sojourner as having status similar to a newborn. Ideas of both birth and death are common during this period. In some ways, the novitiate is neither living nor dead, but in a process of sloughing off the



previous self. Many anthropologists (see Powdermaker 1966, Goodall 1988, Irwin 2007) have experienced “culture shock” as a result of finding themselves in a foreign field site with no notion of how to function. As part of their experience, they need to find/create their place in this new society.

- Learning the secrets, mythology, and cosmology of the rites – the sacra. As part of their process, graduate students learn about a new culture and often use a difference language. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) suggested that this period encourages reflexivity in the doctoral researcher. She continues on to posit that this distancing from self is critical to the development of a researcher.

One could argue that the separation and liminal phases were more intense for the “traditional” anthropology student because of the real, physical separation of overseas fieldwork. To continue this line of thought, as Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) does, it could be reasoned that it is difficult to develop reflexivity without an experience of living as the “other.”

This rite of passage is at the core of anthropology’s distinctive way of knowing the world (Salvador et al. 1999). Baba goes so far as to say, “Methodological training was not necessary, as fieldwork was essentially a rite of passage, with the criteria of competency being the production of an ‘ethnography,’ whose quality was judged by others who had produced one. Such epistemological assumptions and standards guarded the gates of professional membership and guaranteed an academic monopoly in anthropology for decades” (Baba 2005:210).

This investment in formation of self and identity as an anthropologist makes it difficult to let go of what a practitioner might see as a piece of themselves. Sandra, half-jokingly states, “Our theories and methods are held sacred and to think people are stealing them!” Others using ethnography as a technique, rather than a product is a threat to their training. As discussed in Chapter five, practicing anthropologists’ identities are already threatened by their academic brothers and sisters’ dismissal.

The argument of the need for foreign field site experience to catalyze the development of reflexivity begs the question, what of anthropologists who study native sites? According to the American Anthropological Association, it has become more common for doctoral candidates in the United States to conduct their doctoral fieldwork within country than without. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) was concerned. She felt that native anthropologists would need to learn to distance themselves from themselves to achieve the objectivity characteristic to anthropologists. If they could achieve this perspective, she suggested, then they would have the advantage of insider knowledge, shortening adjustment time and gaining acceptance more quickly. Gusterson (1997) challenged her apprehension. Since funding for fieldwork ebbs and flows, doing native or repatriated anthropology is a viable option and gives researchers the opportunity to “study up.” However, foreign fieldwork continues to be seen by the discipline as necessary to create a “real” anthropologist (Baba 2006a). If foreign soil fieldwork is responsible for a large part of the identity of an anthropologist, this trend should result in anthropologists with a decidedly different persona.

However, for now, as a means of protecting themselves from a perceived incursion, anthropologists are taking steps to maintain professional boundaries. Ethnographers are not unaware of this boundary maintenance. Franco (E MA) notices that when his anthropologist colleagues get together, they “make the obvious point that they’re having an anthropologist exchange. I don’t know what to think about that.” He ascribes it to boundary formation. “I don’t think they’re necessarily made to differentiate me and them. I think they’re made more to reinforce and confirm who they are to each other.” Paul (E MS) went to dinner with a group of colleagues through Anthrodesign. He relates a discussion in which he tried to participate, “So at one point these guys start having this conversation about, [I had] no idea what it was about... It just went way over my head, you know? I mean [this guy] is this very smart, very articulate guy... Just kind of academic and not someone that I could have a beer with, which is sort of what that event was about.”

There is evidence that ethnographers feel that anthropologists are overreacting in their response to ethnographers. They repeatedly state that ethnographic work is just one method in a toolkit. Franco is emphatic that the tools that anthropologists use are not that difficult to learn. As he puts it, “No offense to anthropologists, but it’s not brain surgery.” Input from the Anthrodesign list serve include comments from Reece (E) who has completed a master’s program excepting his thesis, who states, “Ethnographic methods are one big bag of tools to employ in the work. To pick on them as a source of contention might be relevant to current discussions in the CHI community, but it’s far outside the areas of controversy I face on projects.” He suggests that any other part of the

data handling process is just as open for discussion, “Why not pick on data analysis methods, for example?” Additionally, Anthony, an information school doctoral student, adds, “Ethnography *\*is\** a data analysis method – or rather it connotes a set of them. From this we might also infer that ethnography would be better thought of as a process than a product, and by doing so better understand how to operationalize ethnographic research.”

Some anthropologists feel the same way. Doug (A MS) agrees that not only is ethnography a tool, but “if someone could prove to me that you can get much better results by this other method, I would get us out of ethnography in a heartbeat. It's insight that I'm after. Now I don't see that day coming any day soon. If you want to get a deep, realized understandings of whatever you're trying to study, ethnography is the way to go.” He acknowledges ethnography's value as a process, but is not so enamored of it that he refuses to consider alternate practices.

### Communities of Practice

Communities of practice (as discussed in Chapter four) are integral to the formation of identity. Through interactions with others doing the work one aspires to do, one not only gains the knowledge of practice, but the knowledge of how to be in that realm (language, clothing, body postures, *et cetera*). However, developing communities of practice has been difficult for practitioners. The introduction to the 2006 EPIC notes, “We recognize that our ‘community’ is still being defined, in part through EPIC. We believe that this second year has helped us take even greater strides in defining who ‘we’ are. More time was dedicated in this year’s program to discuss the ‘we’ that comprises

our community by representing the multiplicity of backgrounds from which practitioners hail and environments in which practitioners work, while staying focused on the practice of ethnography within the business setting that binds us together” (Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference Proceedings 2006). Still, the networks of practitioners remain fairly loose. The most obvious forms continue to be the EPIC conferences, Local Practitioner Organizations, and e-networks like Anthrodesign.

Networks serve the dual purpose of enhancing a researcher’s value to his or her company and improving the researcher’s experience of work. Both Barbara (A PhD) and Franco (E MA) feel they increase their value to their employers with the networks they had developed. Barbara states, “I bring twenty years of research in this area. [My employer] very quickly got to put this work more on the map than if they hired somebody right out of school who didn’t have a track record. I bring an incredible network of people that I’ve worked with over the years: academics, researchers, and other corporations that we can tap into and we are.” Franco feels strongly that success in his firm requires the ability to establish a network. “Those people that succeed at [this company] will be those people that can connect with others well and can bring those connections into the [workplace].” He goes on to explain, “What you know often depends on who you know.” One of his goals is to expand his global connections, which he feels would further increase his value. He talked of building a “global network of ethnographic anthropologist researchers.”

Sandra used both her experience and her network in getting a grasp on her new position. “Like anyone else, you build on your knowledge. [I’m] turning back to

anthropology 101 [and] the things I've read... [I'm] calling on my network. That's why I talked to my colleague and said, '[You have] papers I'd like to infuse into this group, just so they have the opportunity to read some of the stuff...'”

The value of work community was mentioned by many participants, both ethnographers and anthropologists. Burt (E PhD) talks about a colleague whom he has known since graduate school. They live on different continents and yet have a brotherly relationship. When they get together to work, they fight like, well, brothers, over grammar points. The outcome, however, is very productive. “I think one of the reasons that we do work very well together is because I don't have to worry about his feelings. [Pause] And I trust him.”

Franco (E MA) talks about how important it is to build and maintain good working relationships with other researchers at his firm. It is particularly difficult for him when he loses colleagues. “It's hard to keep my enthusiasm. I ask myself, ‘Why am I still here? Is there something better?’” One of his bosses was particularly difficult to work for and she “Went through people like they were disposable. She was very hard, but she was good for me. Others left the organization.” He speaks about the importance of working cohesively with others on a project, “If we like each other, it's great.” Within his organization, it falls on the individual to develop working relationships. “It's driven by social capital. It's done by relationships. ‘Do I know them, like them; have I worked with them before?’ Sometimes it's much more important to have a working culture fit. That will take you farther than bringing in someone.” For Franco, having a well-aligned team is more important than having each role precisely filled.

Charlene (E PhD) feels the lack of not being included in an anthropology network. “Because you’re not part of that in crowd, the ones that contribute regularly to Anthrodesign, it’s almost as if, I feel like you start out behind. If you’re an anthropologist, you have immediate credibility.” She ascribes her isolation to having not learned ethnography until she did her dissertation: “I didn’t even know that ethnography existed when I was a Ph.D. student.” She feels that graduate school was where one starts developing one’s network as an anthropologist. “I’ve done it through different means and now call myself professionally an ethnographer. I could never claim to be an anthropologist.”

The importance of networks is exemplified by Paul (E MS) who consciously works at developing them. “My office symbolizes the range of things I’ve gotten to do and telling stories of the work you do is an interesting way for me to develop my network.” As far as he is concerned, the more intriguing the work, the better the potential story. He also discovered that contributing to a well-known industrial design website had the benefit of increasing his exposure within that community. “In the product design, the human computer interaction/usability world, I touch those fields because I write things that get read or host discussion groups or speak at things where those people are, so you know, you get known. It’s like ‘Oh yeah, here’s Paul. I’ve seen your posts.’” He notes that there was a community forming, separate from applied anthropology.

Looking at some of the professional organizations available to anthropologists and ethnographers (see Table 5.1) shows significant overlap. Since many of the participant anthropologists feel the AAA no longer adequately addresses their needs and

in fact are lobbying for a new organization, it remains to be seen how successfully the other organizations will meet the requirements of practitioners.

**Table 5.1** Professional organizations

Business Anthropologists' Organizations	Ethnographer/Design Organizations
American Anthropological Association (AAA)	About, with, and for/IIT Design Research Conference
National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA)	American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA)
Society for Applied Anthropology (SFAA)	Industrial Design Society of America (IDSA)
Local Practitioner Organizations (LPOs)	Usability Professionals Association (UPA)
Association for Computing Machinery Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction (ACM SIGCHI)	Association for Computing Machinery Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction (ACM SIGCHI)
Anthrodesign	Anthrodesign
Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference (EPIC)	Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference (EPIC)

Anthropologists practicing outside of academia have long felt the disdain of their academic counterparts. The discounting of their professional choices by those who once were their mentors results in resentment and insecurity. Unfortunately, this insecurity carries over into anthropologists' relationships with other practitioners who may threaten anthropologists' reputations with what is perceived is bad practice. As a result, anthropologists, especially Ph.D.-level practitioners, who have undergone an intensive identity formation process, struggle to establish boundaries between themselves and other practitioners. Professional organizations could serve as both gatekeepers and certification organizations, but unfortunately, none of them to date has undertaken these functions. Additionally, communities of practice, which could help train and indoctrinate ethnographic researchers, have been slow to develop.



## Chapter 6     Practitioner Evaluations of Work and Achievements

“I am black on the right side.”

“I fail to see the significant difference...”

“Lokai is *white* on the right side. All of his people are white on the right side.”

- Bele – Star Trek episode 70

“Let That Be Your Last Battlefield”

As Chapter five developed, the geographic/ethical positioning of anthropologists is contested territory. It also explored the differences in practice that practitioners’ perceived between anthropologist ethnographers and ethnographers from other backgrounds. This chapter explores the practitioners’ reflection and reflexion on their value added, their assessment of the value of academic degrees, and their experiences working with employers and/or clients.

### **Attitude About Their Praxis**

Anthropologists’ expressed value falls imprecisely into the categories of tangible and less tangible results. It is interesting, but not surprising that they cited more abstract benefits than concrete. Most tangible was the goal of helping companies increase sales, an objective which has caused concern among researchers. Doug (A MS) feels that, “[Once you’re employed by a company] this is a pretty poor time to worry about that.” He explains that he never encountered a client whose goal was merely to “make stuff.” In his experience, a company who wants to “get away with something” would not be successful on a long-term basis. While their goal is to increase sales, it is also to be

successful and that requires sensitivity to customers' needs. Doug's firm's niche is helping companies understand their customers and thereby regain market share. "There is a major retail chain... all of their stores are doing the strategy they worked out with us. I heard a major CEO address the industry and press and the speech was based on one of the things we did with the company. That's like, 'Wow!'"

Similarly, Marcel's (A MA) goal is to help companies minimize productivity dips when implementing new computer systems. "When you change everyone's job at the same time, there's training issues so you always get a decrease in productivity. That's a given. The goal for me and the way I would sell myself to clients is that I can, hopefully, shorten that time of lowered productivity." He feels that if there is adequate preparation and training prior to launch, then "People will quickly come up to speed and within a few weeks, production goes up, which is the point of the new system."

Marcel sees his goal as being very practical and having the added value of being good for the workers. He offers that if he does his job well, the implementation of a new system includes input from the users, increasing buy-in and easing the transition period. He feels that his ability to discover unspoken needs is critical to the success of the project. He has experienced employers with an attitude of, "'We'll get a few end users and set them down and have them tell us what they need.' That's considered enlightened. But I would argue that end users don't really know. So getting a wish list from them is not sufficient. My goal was to have a better way of finding out what those needs are and infuse them into the design of the system."

Less measureable benefits included developing useful technology, creating relevant research, problem solving, and assisting change. Sandra (A PhD) hopes that she will be remembered for working on a project that created technology that had a positive impact on the average person's life. The deliverable for her current project is to help ensure its success. To that end, she needs to: "Try to figure out what's going on, trying to steer people towards it, try to give them technical [n.d.] support as well as coordination support."

Making sure the research is relevant is one of the benefits Barbara (A PhD) saw in her work. She works to ensure that she stays on task: "Okay, how is this going to be useful for whom we're doing this research?" The framework her team develops will serve the dual purposes of providing a cosmology for data collection and management as well as make sure the research remains connected and useful for the client. She is aware that "What we bring to the table has got to be useful for that next step or else, in this context, we haven't done our job."

Not surprisingly, anthropologists' find that one of their values is creating bridges between anthropology and business. Beryl's (A PhD) favorite part of her job is her mastery in the field of both anthropology and business. She returned to graduate school after earning her doctorate to learn about business so that she could "do an effective job of bringing anthropology and business together. I can consult for organizations instead of just research and give them advice. I didn't have the skill to do that before. It's a great feeling of value added." Along the same lines, Sandra (A PhD) feels she contributes by

helping manufacturers understand the cultures behind the markets. Based on her work, an electronics manufacture designed separate interfaces for Asian and Western markets.

Tanya (A PhD) takes great pleasure in being able to apply anthropological theory to a modern problem. During the analysis phase of a project, she noticed that one participant's behavior was explainable with Victor Turner's theory regarding rites of passage and identity formation. Her participant, who had undergone a profound physical transformation, had physically separated himself from his familiar environment, allowing his identity to adjust to the change before returning. "[It was an] absolutely perfect application of anthropology." Her discovery excited her because it connected her work to the broader body of work conducted by anthropologists throughout the world. "All of these people all around the world studying human existence, documenting it in ethnographic monographs and giving them to the field for me to read and then to apply to a very pressing modern day problem." She attributes her ability to make connections to the fact that, as she puts it, "I was trained well." She describes her value added as a deep rooting in anthropological theory: "The ability to be able to look at a situation and pull out what is cultural and what is universal. The ability to map process, cultural process. So being able to be an astute observer of people's behaviors and then placing that in the context of what anthropological theory has to offer." She ends with an endorsement of her background: "Those are the things that I have and that's why I think anthropology places you in a different situation."

Barbara (A PhD) talks about educating her colleagues and building relationships. She keeps theory books in her office, but rarely uses them herself. "To be honest, I use

them more to share with my colleagues. The kind of work I do is relatively new here at this research facility. So in conversations with colleagues, I might pull out a book and say, 'For example,' or 'Take a look at this.'" Much of her work is developing relationships, both within her facility and within the larger company so that she continues to ensure her work makes sense in a larger context and to develop relationships with potential partners. She feels the networking is necessary if her work is to have impact.

Contributing to the body of knowledge is repeated mentioned by anthropologists as an important part of their role. Indeed, Ph.D. anthropologist Margaret boldly stated in an Anthrodesign thread that "For me, what makes an 'anthropologist' an 'anthropologist' isn't just a matter of training, though anyone with a Ph.D. would likely agree that the process is a profoundly transformative experience (in a good way). It's whether or not you're actively contributing to the growth of the field's collective knowledge, if you're engaged in its discussions and debates and knowledge production activities." She acknowledged that anthropologists without Ph.D.s can and do contribute and that Ph.D.-holding anthropologists contribute to other fields. Correspondingly, Beryl (A PhD) confessed that she does not consider the work she does to be anthropology because "there's no scholarship."

Some of the anthropologist participants feel they do not contribute to anthropology and some find it intriguing to contribute to other disciplines. Lara (A PhD) hopes she is contributing to anthropology, computer mediated communication, or the anthropology of science. "I feel that I'm really contributing quite a bit to understanding how social dynamics affects the creation of scientific epistemologies." She also hopes to

add to the understanding of semiotics, identity, and community. Sandra is an example of a Ph.D. anthropologist who is excited to add to other fields' knowledge base. "I hope I'm contributing to anthropology, but also more general that's why it's fun to have a paper written in a strange computer science [journal]."

Marcel (A MA) on the other hand, does not feel he is ready to contribute to any field even though he has worked in some very difficult work environments as an anthropologist. "I would like to be writing about this stuff and giving papers about it. I'm not contributing to the field of business management. I could and should be. I'm not yet mature enough to contribute to anthropology. I would like to think I could contribute to anthropology, but all I'm doing, even if I'm doing my best, is taking from anthropology what it has to give. Nothing I'm going to do will give back to anthropology. The real winner would be business management, the science of business management."

Another stated value added is "doing good." For example, Barbara (A PhD) belongs to an organization whose goal is to make sure that technology is developed in a responsible way. Tanya (A PhD) started a program at her children's school, aimed at encouraging exercise. "I'm absolutely driven to use my training and my perspectives to fix something and then learning as I go." She is concerned about leaving a small footprint environmentally, but is occasionally frustrated by anthropology's inability to translate research into policy implications. She hopes she will be remembered for helping to improve conditions for future generations. Besides doing good in her community, Tanya gives back by participating in professional organizations. At the time of her interview, she is running for office and reminds me to vote for her.

In looking at the ethnographers from other fields, it is unexpected that they cite no tangible benefits as a result of their work. Perhaps part of the problem was discussed by Charlene (E PhD) who finds it difficult to explain her varied experience: “Working in community and training and conflict resolution and public policy and legislation and academe and ethnography – all that gets applied at any one time.” She tends to simplify her career so that she can take advantage of the usually limited time allotted for work history. Paul (E MS) also has difficulty discerning what value he adds.

Part of Matthew’s (E PhD) value added is to set clear expectations. His ‘spiel’ is to tell potential clients that they, to paraphrase, “don’t need no stinkin’ anthropologist.” Instead, “What you are looking for is someone who is going to do the research that you need to inform design decisions,” who, of course, is him, coming from an extensive background in design. He describes his value as being “able to figure out what the important story is that you want to tell about something. That’s a weird way to talk about analysis. But I think writing a paper essentially is, what is the main point?” In his work experience, finding something useful is more important than finding something interesting. “I think probably that’s the skill that differentiates me as someone doing this type of research.” He hopes that people will remember his ability to make research understandable to non-researchers. He does not want to sacrifice rigor, but to increase accessibility innovatively.

Only Ph.D. ethnographer Charlene mentions that she would like to add to some discipline’s knowledge base, even though she does not have a particular disciplinary affiliation to which she would like to contribute. She thinks that eventually she will add

to health care industry knowledge. She also thinks she could contribute to anthropology if they would accept a non-anthropologist.

Ethnographers are less certain about their ability to “do good.” Franco (E MA) reveals that he hopes he is doing good by sharing his participants’ stories with company executive who had never before heard the clients’ perspective. He admits that he is not “out on a big mission to advocate for the [client], but I was motivated to get our clients to look at [clients] or consumers in a different way.” Despite the talk he hears in industry about putting clients first, he feels it is only lip service. Burt (E PhD) is not uncertain about his ability to effect change; he is convinced he does no good. In one study, he tried to keep the client from changing the physical office structure. “So I was trying to stop them from screwing people. [Laughing] Well, actually every time I’m [working in] industry [I’m going to think that] [Laughing].” However, he’d discovered that his work didn’t affect the outcome: “Top executives do what the f\*\*\* they want regardless of what data you give them.”

Supporting Doug’s views on working for producers, Franco (E MA) identifies what he thinks is the core of the ethical repugnance some researchers express toward working for and with businesses. “The main ethical problems for some people are, ‘Is the work that we’re doing contributing to more consumption in the world?’ The answer is ‘Yes’ and I don’t think we can escape it working here. All of our work is contributing to that whether they’re plain old consumers, workers or whatever it is.”

One of the prevalent themes to emerge from practitioners was the importance of “changing perceptions,” also referred to as “reframing,” making the familiar foreign, or



challenging assumptions. As part of their mission, ethnographers work to change the understanding of their clients, their students, and even themselves.

Franco (E MA) finds that in order to open his clients' eyes, he must "create a story that's compelling, that the audience will want to listen to. It's got to be familiar and also provocative." Newly minted M.A. ethnographer Sarah finds that she is "constantly, constantly challeng[ing] every assumption." She feels that she needs to bring more of this approach into all aspects of her life. "I think I go into situations, even in my personal life, in my relationships, and my work life with assumptions and I just need to dispel those."

Paul (E MS) related a project in which he introduced a semi-constructed media device into people's homes. As they were using it, he realized that the design was ambiguous, unintentionally so. It was difficult for a user to determine what the product was meant to be. What he brought back to the client was not a set of desired features, which is what the client has hoped to receive, but rather a clarification of the product itself. He feels he uncovered strategic issues around the product of which the client had not conceived.

Burt (E PhD), who also teaches social science as part of a technology program, advocates "broaden[ing] the way people think about design. Designers design technology, the technology gets used. What we do get them to understand is how they affect people's work. And how to collect info in real life settings to think in a more situated manner."

The anthropologists in the study also work to help clients see things differently. Doug (A MS) gives the example of what he calls “a simple reframe.” A Japanese client company engaged his design firm to do a study of wearable computers. The research revealed that no one wanted to wear a computer. He feels that by discovering that people wanted access to distributed computing, “the world [became] a very open place.” He continues, “Reframing is a large part of what we do. That's often the first thing we do.” He stresses that “We don't use the phrase ‘user,’ ‘informant,’ or ‘participant’ because informants, users, consumers don't buy products. People buy products; people use things; people have lives. We can't always just use the word ‘people’ but we try to make sure it's always people. ‘Our users...’ ‘No, your people.’ We constantly try to force humanity.”

Challenging assumptions is also an important part of Barbara's (A PhD) work. During one project, she was asked to evaluate the function of a dispersed team. She found that the team functioned as independent entities. “One could come to the conclusion that you need to break down the boundaries. We wanted to say, ‘No, boundaries are a necessary part of getting the work done.’ So it's understanding how boundaries play out in the workings of group, trying to understand the work that boundaries do, and the work that people do in relationship to those boundaries. Then, how can we help support people in spanning boundaries, in maybe crossing over and participating in places where you didn't participate before?” She believed that the client would not have considered this possibility without her work.

## **Evaluation of Training**

What constitutes adequate training for an ethnographer is often discussed among practitioners. It is one of the major questions of this thesis. What constitutes sufficient preparation? Does one need academic training or is on-the-job training just as effective? What level of academic achievement is desirable? Chapter four told of the increased availability of training outside of the anthropology academy. In this section, I look at practitioners' opinions of training and background.

Whether or not a practitioner needs a doctoral degree to work effectively as an ethnographer is a contested issue. Surprisingly, the debate is not split cleanly between those holding Ph.D.s and those with master's degrees. For example, M.A.-holding architecture student Stephanie started a thread in a post to Anthrodesign by asking, "Are people who use anthropologically-derived methods, who are not pedigreed anthropologists, ethnographers, or ethnomethodologists deemed as less worthy? There's a clear value in a Ph.D. that I can see--but do those with the degree think less of researchers without? How to bridge this gap?"

Robert (A PhD), responding to Stephanie's question noted that, "Interestingly, this seems to occur only on the anthro side of the house: I don't recall any discussions explicitly about people untrained in design doing design, though I would guess that some of the design folks have ideas about good vs. less good design and what contributes to each (does design school help?)"

Continuing in the "Stephanie" thread, Anthrodesign contributor Oren (A PhD) offered that it's not necessary to have training to do ethnography, but the results are

superior if the training is in place. “People have flown aeroplanes but never had any pilot training. Having had pilot training, however, helps flying a plane.” He goes on to wonder if the debate over who needs what degrees to practice ethnography is “access control to a[n] elitist, selective group” and functions as boundary work. Continuing the discussion, Margaret (A PhD) wrote that achieving a Ph.D. both changes your identity and creates a responsibility. The responsibility is to contribute to the body of knowledge – bringing accounts of ones engagements in the field to colleagues for discussion. It also increases, she cites Bourdieu, your anthropological “disposition.” Finally, Robert (A PhD) counseled against getting the additional degree. He felt that the primary reason to become a Ph.D. would be to teach.

Jennifer (A PhD) acknowledges that she sees tension between researchers with doctorates and master’s degree. “There’s a lot of sensitivity.” One of her colleagues, an master’s degree holder, feels that a doctorate-level researcher should not be given more respect, money, or power than he receives. She senses his position is, “You don’t need to get a Ph.D.. You can learn to do this stuff and do just as good.” She feels that might be true, but the work would be different. “It’s not a question of good or bad, but it’s [just going to make a difference].”

Charlene (E PhD) can see the difference between an anthropologist and a non-anthropologist doing ethnography in their theoretical standpoint, which she thought was important. However, in considering skills, she feels the gap disappears. She feels that there is a lot of overlap between her master’s degree in public administration and anthropology. “I was doing this kind of work and thinking this way before I even knew it

existed. That just comes from being aware that there are stakeholders; there's more than just two parties involved.”

Jennifer provides a reason why Ph.D.-level anthropologists advocate for doctorate-holding practitioners. She is still very attached to her Ph.D. materials. She keeps them in her dining room bookcases. She takes great pride in having achieved her Ph.D., or more to the point, having survived the Ph.D. process: “I guess by the time you've finished your Ph.D., you've worked so hard and so long for it, you would never... it's almost like having gone to war, put your life on the line to fight for something. When you come back, it would be very hard to say it wasn't worth it, that there wasn't some substantive reason for doing that.” It would cause her a degree of cognitive dissonance to admit that others could do her job as well as she could, discounting what she had undergone to achieve her degree.

Doctoral anthropologists find great value in their training. Lara suggests that “You bring the skill that people perceive the world differently. They have different worldviews. And you're open to that from the very beginning.” She thinks that ethnographers without much background might have difficulty discerning the difference between what is said and what is done: “Things may not be as they seem.” In her experience, anthropological insight has the effect of, “You suddenly see the world, it rips the lid off. The lens has shifted a little bit and... you have trouble kind of going back... because you always have to hold those two different models in your head.”

Affirming Lara's thoughts, Sandra (A PhD) offers, “I contribute by realizing that people work within a culture, not the culture of the Yanomamo, but a disciplinary

culture.” It allows her to see the subtle status markers in the workplace, for example, high-level employees dressing in a “grungy” style. In this case, she sees that “You don’t advertise your credentials because you’ve already got them.”

Robert (A PhD), on the Anthrodesign list serve, was quite emphatic about the value of his training when he wrote “I would maintain that much of my value (such as it is) comes from the second part of my position: knowing what to look for, how to recognize it when I see it, make sense out of it, and convey it to others (or help them recognize it and make sense out of it). The “it” here comes directly from my training AS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST [emphasis in original].” He stated that he rarely heard non-anthropologists discussing topics such as social networks and relationships, class, ethnicity, social status, *et cetera*, as explanations for how people function, and ultimately for him, whether or not they will buy the product in question.

Not surprisingly, master’s degree level participants feel differently. What is surprising is that few of them feel the need to discuss the value of an academic degree. Only Doug, with a master’s degree in anthropology, expresses an opinion. After his interview, we walk back to our cars. Doug is interested in my thesis and what I am searching for. We start talking about theory and practice. I talk about my belief that researchers with doctorates are better able to see nuances. Doug says his experience is the opposite: they do not ask the interesting questions and there is a lack of subtlety there. He feels it is more about who has what tools, that a degree is a “red herring” and does not have much value. “It’s the person who generates the nuances. It’s intuition. Using life

to make conclusions from incomplete data.” For him, it is an issue of individual competency.

The need to be able to work multidisciplinarily is a theme that emerged several times throughout the study, from Franco (E MA) talking about the value of his diverse interests, to Doug (A MS) stating that his company will not hire researchers with a narrow knowledge base, to Wendell’s need for researchers without a commitment to an individual field. Anthropology has a tradition of across academic boundaries as evidenced by what has been called “adjectival” sub-subfields, or interest areas, such as medical anthropology, psychological anthropology, nutritional anthropology, and educational anthropology. Additionally, business researchers are implicitly asked to become experts in areas in which they have no background. Such is the case for Sandra (A PhD) who took on the task of helping ensure the success of a project in a field unfamiliar to her. Another example is Marcel (A MA) who was thrown into a situation involving levels of bureaucracy he had never experienced and had to learn to negotiate. Consider Burt (E PhD) who, again, became an authority on a class of workers of whom most people are not aware. The list of examples includes almost every researcher in this sample.

### **Attitude Toward Employers**

Having looked at practitioners’ perception of themselves and the value of their degrees, this chapter now looks at the attitude of researcher toward employer (Chapter eight discusses employers’ reactions to researchers). Practitioners discussed their philosophies for working with clients/employers. Most took the approach of

collaborating with the client, in many cases educating them and/or using their ethnographic skills to understand how best to present data. In some cases, there were misalignments between researcher and employer. For anthropologist Doug (MA) however, his firm enjoys congenial relationship with most clients. This could be due to the firm's behavior toward them. "We're very open with our clients. We don't hide anything from them. They're welcome to stay everyday in that project space – we encourage it. I think one of the reasons for our success is we genuinely like our clients and we behave that way. We think they're smart. We genuinely think we cannot do our job without their help."

Anthropologist Tanya (PhD) is representative of the participants who are wary of the employer's use of their data. Her approach is to be very open about her concerns while engaging in research for a client. In the project she discussed, she was to study people who had successfully made significant life changes. Her apprehension was that the client would attempt to make a product to address a problem that she saw as needing behavioral changes. She used the opportunity to educate the client with the data she collected in the field. In another situation, she had been asked to talk to companies about anthropology (which they were calling ethnography). When they asked, "How can you help us develop this product?" She would respond, "You need to have a dialogue. I can tell you what people say and what people do and then you can tell me what you're capable of designing." She notes that this type of exchange is a rare thing.

Despite the stories above describing pleasant working relationship between clients and practitioners, there were numerous examples of employers and researchers



mismatches. In some cases, the issue was one of ethics. In others, the employer wanted work from the researcher that was ill suited to the researcher's skill set or created roadblocks to the research.

Tanya feels she has found a means to mitigate the misuse of data by employer or clients. However, other participants worry that clients might not respect their wishes and would use data inappropriately. Lara (A PhD) suggests that, "[When you are working in house] you are studying other people who are being paid to do what they do. It's tough. You can't control who's going to use that information and how it's going to be used. I would hate for anybody to come back and say, 'Well you know the anthropologist said that you're doing this or that.' And then using that and make their lives more difficult whatever it was before. So I think that's a real, that's a real negative." Franco (E MA) adds, "You might not always agree with what [the client is] doing. So I've have moments of regret where I'm making a case about this future and a company here in front of me [sees it] as a business opportunity. The end effect might be they introduce more ambiguity into the market place, more choices that overwhelm people." Other examples of ethical paradoxes include Jennifer's (A PhD) situation. Her employer reinterpreted data in a way that didn't match with her analysis. She found it disturbing that the employer's view conveniently fit in with his worldview that teens were not to be trusted. During one of Curtis' (A MA) projects involving workers in a grocery store, the client continually tried to paint the workers as being lazy and needing to be controlled. The researcher kept trying to reframe the discussion into talk of useful versus non-useful work.

Burt (E PhD) is also concerned about the work he is sometimes asked to do. The reasons for his hire are rarely explicit and he finds himself used as a weapon in an unknown battle. He finds that he is frequently brought in to do research to support someone's personal stance, whether it is for the overall good or not. However, his work is usually not in alignment with the management position and his findings rarely make a difference. Additionally, he is often hired by an individual to help save someone's job, not necessarily the individual who hired him, but someone with whom the client is aligned. Burt's motivation is often to prevent an employer from doing something he thinks is a bad idea. He summed up his experience saying, "In industry, data is a weapon to use against employees or another company. In academia, it's knowledge."

Marcel (A MA) experienced his employer hamstringing his efforts to carry out his research. His goal was to attempt to help the military implement large-scale management software. He repeatedly ran into roadblocks. He and his employer disagreed on methodology including whether or not he should be allowed to talk with the employees.

Franco (E MA) has developed a different perspective on working for a company which might set off his ethical alarms. He acknowledges that working for such a company would be difficult. However, "Sometimes working [with] those companies is good because you're in a position to can help them frame certain issues in a different or broader way. Sometimes that's enough to say, 'This is not a problem, I can do this work.'"

Paul (E MS) has been experiencing a frustrating new development with potential employers. He is noticing that employers are either coming to him asking for research planning advice, but not for bids, or approaching him after they had already established their research protocols. He is not sure what is motivating this behavior, but he is ready for something to change.

To summarize this section, anthropologists with both masters' and doctoral degrees were able to provide examples of both concrete and more abstract benefits that they bring through their work. However, the lines between tangible and intangible value were drawn between degree holders, with master's-holding researchers citing measurable concepts such as improving market share and mitigating productivity loss. Doctorate-holding practitioners listed material outcomes – helping to develop useful technology – but also saw their value as providing relevancy, helping disciplines blend strengths, educating colleagues and employers, and “doing good.” Indeed contributing to the body of knowledge was seen as so important that not to add to the “library” would, in the words of one participant, remove the practitioner’s work from the realm of the anthropological practice. There was some latitude about to which discipline one contributed.

While there was less expectation of ethnographers, from backgrounds which may or may not include social science theory, to list the abstract value of their work, several mentioned difficulty in defining what they felt were their concrete contributions. Likewise, contributing to a discipline’s knowledge base was only briefly discussed by a participant. Even the seemingly ubiquitous goal of “doing good” was mentioned as a

source of frustration. However, one positive behavior that was talked about frequently was the sharing of knowledge with employers and practitioners to change perspective or challenge assumptions.

Regarding the issue of degree and praxis, while Ph.D.-holding practitioners generally advocated that researchers needed a terminal degree (Ph.D.), it was not universally accepted, even by other doctorate holders. Master's degree obtainers did not see the need for a doctoral degree. In fact, one practitioner saw the achievement of a Ph.D. as stifling creativity. Chapter eight provides a discussion by employers on whether a Ph.D. provides increased competency.

Finally, on their relations with employers, while several of the researchers had achieved congenial relationship with their employer/clients, there were several instances of miscommunication between researchers and employers. The chief concern was the misuse of data by the client to meet their own agenda. However, in reality, no researcher ever has control of the ways in which their data could be applied, something that academic anthropology has long protested (see Chapter five).

This chapter has provided a glimpse into practitioners' views of themselves, their training, and their relationship to employers. Chapter seven will explore the actual details of praxis of the researchers and Chapter eight will explore the outcomes of practice, both more and less positive.

## Chapter 7    Comparing Praxis

Another graduate student and I have completed work for a big-name electronics manufacturer. For several days, we have observed shoppers in a electronics warehouse-type store. Our goal has been to record reactions to a new type of hands-on display for wearable telecommunications devices. What we have mostly observed is people walking around the display to get to other merchandise. The responses have been less than enthusiastic. For over a week I have been looking at our data sheets, creating complicated spreadsheets and coming up with nothing other than people didn't seem to care about it one way or the other. Not really the conclusion you want to reveal to your client your first time out in the field as a principal investigator. "Uh, sorry. I got nothing." Then I remember something, not from an anthropology class, but from a social psychology class I had taken as an undergraduate. Goffman and front-stage, back-stage behavior! I have a theory to explain the lack of response. Although I am not quite satisfied with this theoretical approach, it works, so we run with it. At the presentation, we start by discussing summaries of the data, what 'types' of people did what, etc. Then we get to that critical moment when the client looks me in the eye and asks, "So how do you explain this?" I start off with my explanation that according to Goffman, people separate activities into those you perform in public and those you do in private. The hands-on part of the display involved sticking electronic pieces in the ear and checking the effect in a provided fixed mirror. We thought that hygiene concerns would cause people to hold the device up to their ear, but not insert it. However, they didn't even put it near their head. I tell the client that it is possible that the shopper felt that looking in the mirror with an electronic gizmo held up to their head, may have felt too private to do in the main aisle of a consumer electronics store. The client's eyes light up and he jumps to his feet. "Okay, so when we launch this in Europe, we have to make sure the displays are down a side aisle! We could even include them as part of the regular merchandise set up!" Although I am shocked by his enthusiastic response to what I consider a weak use of theory, he is thrilled, and in this case, if the client's happy, I am happy. As we start packing up to leave, he stops me one more time: "How do you spell 'Goffman'?" he asks, pulling out a pen and grabbing a notepad. Score one more for the ubiquitous theoretician.

To understand how the practice of the different types of researchers compares, it is valuable to look at their approach to work. This chapter looks at the methodologies of the researchers from the use of theory to deliverable.

One of the areas that researchers feel reveals the greatest difference between practitioners is the use of theory. There is evidence both within the literature and from participants that research reflects the researcher, including the practitioner's theoretical grounding. Dourish (2006), a Ph.D.-level computer scientist, looked reflectively at how the practitioner affects the research. He found that the class, ethnicity, and education of the viewer contributed to the outcome of a project. Research results were not only about the culture being observed, but equally concerned the cultural lens of the researcher and the audience for whom it was intended. Therefore, he hypothesized that one's theoretical mindset was obviously important. Further, he offered that ethnography without theory becomes, in the words of Button, "scenic fieldwork." LeCompte and Schensul (1999a) asserted that the researcher is the principal data collection tool, an idea echoed by several of the participants. Researchers steeped in theory develop a *habitus* that carries over into their work. Therefore, it is useful to look at the relationship of the practitioners in this study to theory.

### **Value of Theory**

Anthropologists have wedded theory to practice with no chance of divorce on the horizon. When a link to Dourish's paper was posted on the Anthrodesign site, Twyla (A PhD) responding to the paper, wrote, "What I most appreciate in his paper is the perspective that ethnography is not a collection of research techniques, but rather a

specific theoretical orientation to knowledge production and representation. In other words, *ethnography is embedded in theory* and thus the use of its common methodological techniques have significant theoretical implications for the outputs and assumptions of the study [emphasis added].”

The anthropologist participants in the study speak with conviction about their connection to theory and its value in research. Sandra (A PhD) asserts, “You talk about what's the difference between anthropology and ethnography. Unless ethnographers have a grounded system, it's just a bunch of methods. It's just like a collection of two or three things that people package together and tout as the next big thing. It's not the next big thing unless you have something, some theoretical hypothesis... something to back it up.” She is not concerned with which discipline provides the theoretical frame, only that the frame be in place to support meaningful analysis.

Likewise, Jennifer (A PhD) feels that her theory is invaluable and she can't imagine doing the work she does if she had only been trained in methods. Certain theoretical positions resolutely remain with her, among them the theory that she used to explain the phenomena she studied in her dissertation regarding economics and capitalism in third world countries. For Jennifer the value of a firm theoretical grounding is the ability to abstract and specialize. She offers her own area of interest as an example. Her focus is turned to the development of capitalism in Asia and its cultural category. “I wouldn't necessarily stop at the baseline insight which is, economy is not a thing, economy is an idea. That insight alone might be where someone who hadn't been through all the years of theory would start.”

The anthropologists cite three very practical benefits of knowing theory. First, Lara (A PhD) is concerned about the inefficiency that results from not knowing theory, “If you're not really informed with some of the theories that have gone into what you're doing, you're just [re]inventing the wheel.” Next, Tanya (A PhD) feels that understanding culture, understanding the system, enables a researcher to “design a solution that reflects human nature.” Finally, Lara mentions that she feels that staying informed about current theoretical concepts is important to the researcher’s reputation. “The researcher loses credibility by slogging out ‘Malinowskian Functionalism’ that we talked about 80 years ago.” This assumes, of course, that someone besides the researcher knows what is Malinowskian Functionalism.

Master’s-level anthropologists have a less committed appreciation of theory. Toward the end of our interview, Doug talks about the role of theory in practice. He asks, “What is theory? When does it become theory? Where does theory reside? What, when, who, how is involved in the generation of theory. And how does it inform the rest of your life?” Seemingly incongruously, we talk about baking and the value of theory in baking. He notes that if one could follow a recipe, one could bake a cake. “However, if you know the theory of how ingredients interact and their purpose in the recipe, then you can substitute, expand, go off in another direction.” Doug suggests that it could be likened to the cooking shows *Good Eats* and *Emeril Live!*. “Alton Brown gives theories for cooking; Emeril gives you a recipe.” I am struck that a practitioner with a master’s degree in anthropology and a master’s candidate resorts to creating analogies out of cooking shows to try to make sense of theory’s role.



Marcel (A MA) has a more engaged view of theory as well as an identified theoretical position. "I think a theoretical basis was my most important tool." He finds that no matter what he might be doing, he filtered it through a theoretical lens. "I was thinking about power structures, gender, the way technology shapes people's lives, especially, the way that people are unaware of the things that actually motivate them." He likes cultural materialism, from the work of Marvin Harris, with its emphasis on the practical (a kind of anthropological Occam's razor). He believes in the "triumvirate" of infrastructure (people's relationship to the environment), structure (people's relationship to one another), superstructure (people's relationship to the supernatural).

None of the ethnographers feels it is imperative that they use theory. The Ph.D.-holding ethnographers have an admittedly very different relationship to theory than do their anthropologist counterparts. Charlene (E PhD) explains, "If I had more time, I would want to take a theoretical course. But there seems to be a more immediate need for application to build my career, my background, my understanding. Just getting hands-on experience is an incredible opportunity, versus taking a theoretical course in anthropology? I don't think there's any competition there." Although she would like to be able to articulate the history of ethnography, at this point more immediate concerns engage her time. Matthew (E), with a Ph.D. in design, feels that "a theoretical perspective just means that you have somewhat of a deeper understanding of the sorts of behaviors that you're talking about." He thinks that having greater insight is useful to him as a researcher and hopes that his perspective would be valued by those who would read his reports: "I wouldn't go off on some theoretical tangent unless I can directly show

people why they should understand it.” For these researchers, the emphasis is on tangible explanations and solutions, rather than what they see as the luxury of theory. Master’s degree level ethnographers spoke only briefly of theory and in a rather perfunctory way. Not one of them mentioned a perceived value in using theory.

### **Use of Theory**

Doctorate-holding anthropologists like theory and see its value; other practitioners were not as enthusiastic about it. Regarding the use of theory, while some of the anthropologists named specific theoretical viewpoints, all discussed their approach to theory. Of those who talked about how they incorporated theory into their work, Ph.D. holder Tanya (A) explains that she does not have a default theoretical bias; rather she found that: “The method of analysis forces itself.” In the case of the representative project she discussed, it was Turner’s life transformation model that emerged – an outline of the steps of the rites of passage that result in a transformation in identity and social status. She also mentions using Vygotsky’s Activity Theory – which at its simplest level, maintains that activity is the basic unit of analysis. Jennifer (A PhD) who above affirms that theory is “invaluable” suggests that she does not use specific theory. This does not imply, however, that she does not use theory, but like Tanya, employs theorists appropriate to the situation. Beryl (A PhD) suggests that low- to mid-level theory is most applicable for practitioners in the business field. “It’s much more difficult to use high-level theory.”

Those anthropologists who name a particular theoretical partiality include Sandra (PhD), who has an economic bias. She is also influenced by Geertz, with his focus on

interpretation of the symbolic and emphasis on “thick” or detailed description. Curtis (A MA) uses grounded theory, a research technique that starts with reviewing the data and then builds hypotheses. Marcel (A MA) is partial to the approach of cultural materialists, like Marvin Harris, and cultural evolutionists such as Elman Service and Leslie White (who theorized that all societies go through set stages of development). He feels that as a Jamesian (based on William James work) pragmatist, “if it’s useful, it’s true.” Employer-anthropologist Andrew (ABD) likes Lewis Binford and the functionalist argument that the Neanderthals’ toolkit was based on function, not culture and history. It is easy to see how that theory has pertinence in his work as a manager of researchers in the design branch of his organization. If we consider Dourish and LeCompte and Schensul’s earlier comments, these ways of thinking influence the anthropologist’s theoretical makeup.

While anthropologists are, in general, ready and willing to talk about theory and tout its value at any opportunity, other researchers are reticent to discuss their relationship. This seems to stem from at least three reasons – they do not know theory, they do not know they know theory, or they know theory and take it for granted.

Both master’s-level anthropologists and ethnographers use theory more than they admit or are aware. They talk about employing theory in an ad hoc manner or in a limited fashion. Franco (E MA) claims, “I’m not conscious of theories. I’m sure that thoughts are borrowed. I’m not concerned about that. I borrow freely in an ad hoc manner, opportunistically.” Later in the interview, he explains further that he is not sure what theory would provide him, but he admits that he is probably unconsciously picking up theory through author’s perspectives and using their point of view without knowing

whose theory he might be presenting.

While Franco uses whatever ideas are at hand, ethnographer Paul (MA) has a superficial knowledge of theory. “I have some of those books and I’ve skimmed them, but I’m familiar with the theory and can cite Goffman. But I haven’t read Goffman. I’m a consultant, you know? [Laughter] Look at all these books that I can reference, that I haven’t read.” Anthropologist Doug (MA) originally said that he didn’t use theory, except Goffman whom he has read. As we talk about the inculcation of theory at the cellular level for Ph.D. holders, he admits that he does use theory, that he has also been imbued with it and therefore, it is not necessary to talk about it.

Neither Michael (ECE PhD) nor Burt (E PhD) talks about theory. However, Burt holds a position as a university professor and has published approximately fifty books and articles. Looking through one of his more recent books, in references he cites, to name just a few of the better known authors, Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Max Weber, and of course, the ubiquitous Erving Goffman. Michael (ECE PhD) is also implicit in his use of theory. He talks about his goal of publishing journal articles to encourage insight for other researchers. Professional journals require a theoretical framework in an article that is accepted for publication. Also, as Michael has a Ph.D. in cognitive science, one would assume that he is very familiar with the use of theory.

Goffman was very popular among everyone except Ph.D.-level anthropologist practitioners. Goffman’s work has the advantage of being well known and accessible. His body of work emphasizes the contextual nature of human behavior and the idea of life as theater, a useful premise when trying to explain public behavior. Paul (E MS)

shared that in one study the field site was the home, “It was about where you watch television in your home and it was Goffman's front stage and backstage stuff. And I actually used that at a talk about where computers and printers go in the house and I just recycled that slide and we talked about the front stage and the backstage.”

Anthropologist Doug (MA) felt that if one were to read Goffman's *Asylums* and *Presentation of Self*, it would be all they needed. He also recommended a textbook by Barrett *The Anthropology Student's Guide to Theory and Method*, Paco Underhill, and Steve Borgatti, a proponent of social network analysis. Doctoral ethnographer Matthew used Goffman in addition to grounded theory and architectural theory like that by Christopher Alexander, who believed in the user's ability to design and build for themselves – a user-centric mindset. Of the Ph.D. anthropologists, only Lara admitted using Goffman.

## **Methodology in Praxis**

### Data Collection

We move into the area of data collection. The attitude toward this aspect of research can seem somewhat schizophrenic. While ethnographers feel that methodology should remain the focus of their research, anthropologists have a different spot for their attention. Recall that Chapter five included a discussion of the identity formation of anthropologists. Also recall that in Chapter four it was revealed that anthropologists are typically not trained in methodology and instead are expected to learn in the field (the iconic story being Kroeber's response to the graduate student). The fieldwork serves both as rite of passage for identity formation and on-the-job training for the emergent

anthropologist. Therefore, when anthropologists talk about data collection, the techniques of actually gathering material are not the focus. However, data collection remains the heart of research.

Anthropologists showed a general irreverence for a specific methodology, putting the emphasis on a holistic perspective of the project. Doug (A MS) states, “I’m not a methodologist at all. I’m firmly in the Margaret Mead School of ‘methods are for people who can’t do.’ That’s not what I try to change. I innovate around that all the time. That’s why I can innovate so well, I’m not committed to any method. [I] look at [the] problem, [and determine] how can we best get the information, what can we do differently to get it... Anything to figure more than I know. I’m not a good methodologist. It’s all in the analysis.” Sandra (A PhD) adds, “To me, methods have never been all that important. Or they’re important, but you choose the right method for the right task.”

Some go so far as to advocate not relying on physical data at all. Tanya (A PhD) once interviewed a well-known anthropology professor at a major university who advised her: “take pictures of everything and write notes on everything and then go lose everything.” This may have been a rationalization as he had upturned his canoe during his fieldwork and lost all his data. Still, Tanya can see his point: “I put less stock in methods than I do in having very good grasp of theory and very good observational skills.” Additionally, both Sandra and Lara realized that one’s methodology should be dictated by the goals of the project and the composition of the community under scrutiny.

Not surprisingly then, anthropologists are flexible about choosing methods, needing the ability to “go with the flow” of the research situation. In another example of the multidisciplinary approach of anthropologists, when she saw patterns that pointed to a need for a psychological approach, Tanya used tests to determine brain-dominance patterns in her participants.

Anthropologists have varied opinions on the type of techniques which should be used: Beryl (A PhD) feels trips to field sites were not always necessary: “Once you have the background in the culture, you can gather information just making phone calls.” Participant Barbara (A PhD) follows a conservative approach: “I’m not one who either thinks you can do it all by interviewing or by videotaping. You need to talk to people too, ask them about what they do.” Tanya agrees, mentioning the need to create intimacy with her participants.

Recalling the anecdote of the professor who lost all his data and was forced to recreate his research from memory, for the Ph.D. anthropologist group, methodology becomes for some, almost a collection of memory devices, rather than data points. Tanya (A PhD) elaborates, “Photos are critical, but I often don’t look at them.” For her, taking photos, recording interviews, in fact, just being in the environment concretize an idea, an event, or a practice. The phenomenon of making the intangible or unconscious evident is, for her again, a technique in itself.

As with the Ph.D.-level anthropologists, there is a variety of methods used by doctoral ethnographers from other fields. Burt is realistic about the limits imposed by the project on data collection methods. For example, his representative project involved

studying people from similar, but different agencies. A random sample wasn't possible. Still, he was very careful to get as representative a sample as possible to minimize skew. His preferred data collection approach was participant observation. "I'm interested in behavior, how people do what they do. So I think social structures are best studied by looking at how people pattern structures and behavior."

Both Burt and Blake (E PhD) agree that participant observation is a valuable approach to data gathering. Blake, from an Anthrodesign post offers, "Interviewing is nice if you want to study accounts for action, but it is always a retrospective on action and not a foundation for action."

However, interviewing remains a popular approach to data gathering. Kenneth (Anthrodesign post, M.A. in anthropology, Ph.D. in communications), feels that there are advantages to interviews, "Not least, the researcher can identify their own personal misconceptions and mistaken research agendas early on." Franco (E MA) conducts very informal interviews. He prefers not to take notes and to let the interviewee speak freely. His preference is to follow up interviews with surveys to gauge the reliability of the interview findings.

Some ethnographers, like Matthew (E PhD), choose the techniques with which he or she is familiar; in his case these are interviewing and videotaping. Others, such as Michael and Charlene, find that they must let the situation dictate the methods used. Michael (ECE PhD) sent his researchers to spend time at work with his study's people, but not in any focused way. They thought they knew what they were looking for until they got into the field. Then they had to rethink their approach. Charlene (E PhD) found



it necessary to take the community perspective under consideration before finalizing her methodology. In her proposed project, she planned to conduct home interviews and participant observation along with video and perhaps ask people to draw maps.

Anthropologists and researchers from other fields keep clients in mind as they chose their approaches. As a proposal for a project, Doug (A MS) gave out disposable cameras to elementary students to take to photos at lunch for a lunchbox project. He thought the uniqueness of this approach would help secure the contract; unfortunately, they did not get the job. Ethnographer Matthew (PhD) was thinking ahead to his deliverable when he chose his methodology. He realized that it would be necessary to present his findings in a substantial way to his clients. Therefore, he chose videography as his data collection method anticipating creating a video for his deliverable.

Paul (E MS) is reluctant to commit to a methodology at the beginning of a project. He has a website where prospective clients can get a sense of his approach. He lists the tools that were typically associated with work similar to his, “depth interviewing, video ethnography, field research, user visits.” However, when he speaks to clients he suggests that they “Let's not worry about that much.” Instead, he talks about “spending time with someone in their context.” He encourages clients to remain flexible about what happens during the time he spends with a participant. In terms of his specific methodologies, he likes his sample size to stay below ten; otherwise, he generates too much data. As far as he is concerned, it is not about the numbers; it is about getting to the insights. He will also use a prototype to stimulate conversation and as well as videotaping, which he feels establishes credibility with the participant and helps him remember details.

## Analysis

If data collection is the heart of research, then analysis would be the soul.

LeCompte and Schensul (1999b) described analysis as turning raw data into manageable chunks or results and then giving it meaning within context. Looking over the data for this section, there is a shared history for several of the researchers in the use of analysis techniques developed at E-Lab. For the other participants, their methods ranged from fairly vigorous (Burt) to somewhat *laissez faire*.

One of the overarching methodologies in terms of analysis for participants of this study is the use of techniques developed at E-Lab. Chapter three included a description of the analysis framework used by that organization. Several of the participants of this study have been affected by the diaspora that occurred when E-Lab was subsumed by Sapien, either directly or indirectly. Of the sixteen researchers in this study (including the crossover participants), eight have some knowledge of E-Labs processes.

Barbara (A PhD), Doug (A MS), and Franco (E MA) elaborate on their use of the techniques. Barbara always holds the researcher's need to create an explanatory framework and the client's need for useful findings in tension. She does not necessarily transcribe tapes; however, she might listen to them again. She both shares notes with her teammate and works individually. Then, at some point, they start to work collaboratively, using the E-Lab techniques of a "project room" and "turning the room." They also bring in non-associated colleagues and tell them "stories" (describe what they had found and their analysis of the data) to see if they make sense, which is another E-Lab technique known as a "story session."

Doug calls his methodology “very low tech” since it consists of the E-lab tools of post-it notes and sharpies. Additionally, he reveals that he walks up to a colleague and start telling stories about how he understands whatever project he is currently analyzing. Through hearing himself speak and by gauging his audience’s reaction, he monitors his progress toward creating a coherent, appropriate explanation of what he has experienced. Like Doug, Franco’s group analysis sessions consist of the same low-tech materials. When he talks about his individual work, he admits, “I don’t know what I’m looking for on the first read.” Although his team may formulate research questions, he is more likely to be guided by his years of experience in looking at the bigger picture; he looks for unarticulated patterns.

Looking at more formal approaches, doctors Lara (A) and Burt (E) both perform rigorous combing of their materials. Talking about her doctoral work, Lara analyzed her materials starting with small units of data and moving on to larger blocks. She found that she was reflexive about her data and her judgments about it. She took the Ruth Baharian approach of considering the researcher as part of the process: “What is data? You can’t ignore your personal feelings. This is what shifts your lens so you see differently.” As a result, she questioned the assumptions of the participants because of her own experience. Burt also followed a more formal protocol. He and his partner entered all the data into an analysis program and coded them. He then re-coded them. He found the coding necessary to determine what he had actually captured. He and his partner, whom he describes as “like a brother,” communicated frequently, often by email, but would meet in person about once a quarter for several days for an analysis session. They both read all

the transcripts, but for coding, they divided the data into broad domains based on their separate research foci.

Despite his need for formal coding software, he joked that he and his colleague were seeing patterns and themes “before we had any data.” In contrast, Michael (ECE PhD) described his analysis process as “very ad hoc.” Despite creating hundreds of hours of video data, they found that most of the useable data came from an initial debriefing. The videotapes were somewhat used in determining the process and logic flow of the participants doing their job. He allowed that he felt he often would “jump to conclusions too easily,” turning speculation into findings in the spirit of “getting something done,” but then hedge when he discussed it further. However, he was operating within the accepted work behaviors of his company as he stated that was “how we make progress around here.”

Curtis (A MA) also looked at the workflow of the jobs he was studying. By using a systems approach, he was able to determine the stakeholders. Despite the attention he devotes to his data, he feels that he is not really trained in analysis, that it is a “hands-off part of an anthropological education.” Sandra’s (A PhD) analysis goal is simple: to find the reasons for the discrepancies between what people say and do, to discover the driving cultural need that acts as a motivator.

At the less formal end of the analysis spectrum are Tanya and Paul. Training and background would place these two researchers at opposite ends of the continuum (Tanya, a “traditionally” trained Ph.D. anthropologist and Paul, a mostly self-trained, M.S.-holding ethnographer). However, they have similar styles of working through data.

Tanya works very intuitively. She listens to her instincts, what she calls “noodgy things.” She finds that her analysis is driven by her “ah-ha” instant, which she refers to as the “doorknob moment.” She gives an example of finishing an interview with a participant. As she was packing up to leave, the informant, a high-powered career woman, mentioned she needed to leave for her pottery class. Tanya leapt on the comment, “Wait a second. I thought I understood everything and now you’re telling me that you’re teaching pottery?”

Paul tells the archetypal research story of listening to lots of interviews and not getting anything until one or two statements by a participant sparks a line of reasoning that anchors his findings (reminiscent of Tanya’s “doorknob moment.”) He typically doesn’t follow a procedure for analysis, but tries to “live” with the data. As patterns start to emerge, seemingly out of his subconscious, he is then able to go back to the data to find evidence supporting his discoveries.

However, in looking at the background and proclivities of these two researchers, the so-called intuitive moments of the two cannot be considered equal. Tanya’s perspective is shaped by years of training, immersion in theory, and offshore fieldwork. Contrast that with Paul’s limited exposure to social theory and his on-the-job ethnography training. Although they may have both provided a valuable product to their client, it must be acknowledge that their processes and probably the products are distinctly different.

### **Deliverable**

When looking at product, there are three questions that need addressing: what is the product? How is it communicated? How should it be evaluated? The first two

questions are discussed within this section. The third and perhaps most thorny, is tackled in the next chapter.

What is reasonable to expect as a product of ethnography? That question was easily answered a hundred years ago – a nice monograph with the purpose of educating administrators and impressing colleagues. Post-modernism, with its emphasis on reflexivity, questioning which view is privileged, and exploding writing conventions, changed that. With the adoption of ethnography as a methodology used by anyone who can find someone to pay them to do it, it has made a deliverable a matter of negotiation and in the worst cases, luck. However, assuming the ethnographer is competent, the project results in some type of endnote, not only marking the completion of the activity, but also providing a deliverable (hopefully) of value to whomever commissioned the study. It may be a paper, a PowerPoint presentation, an executive summary, a video, or an interactive workshop. What it most likely will not be, is an ethnography, a writing describing a culture. It may contain ethnographic sections that serve to enrich the deliverable and draw the reader into the world of the participants. In the interest of meeting the client's needs, ethnographic detail must serve the greater driver of providing useful, perhaps even actionable, information.

Another way of describing the deliverable would be the communication of findings (supportive data points, analysis, and perhaps recommendations) to someone outside the inner workings of a project in such a way as to make the findings understandable and optimistically, useful. There may be other important goals such as presenting the other's point of view, reframing the objective, or challenging

preconceptions, but ultimately, in a business environment, if the basic needs of the client have not been met the project is a failure. Important points to successful communication include knowing the culture and language of the audience. Starting from their viewpoint and then leading them to a new way of perceiving is generally more successful than dogmatically presenting the results.

Andrew (ECA ABD) as both a consumer and creator of product, recommends keeping the findings simple and accessible and to tailor the presentation to the audience. “The default expectation among engineers is that you're doing ethnography for design and technology and it's really empirical behavioralistic stuff. If you don't deliver that, there're problems.” Once the researcher gives the audience what they want/expect, they are able to listen to “higher structural level things” as long as the message remains relevant. “If you can move from talking about behaviors of people in China around a PC and then talk about the need to design a PC for education in China, that's cool.”

The admonition to align the deliverable to the audience intellectually and paradigmatically was endorsed by several participants. Ethnographer Franco (MA) presents the findings in a way that engage the client. His team often uses interactive presentations to leverage active learning theory. Anthropologist Sandra (PhD) relates, “I always have to make sure that it's appropriate for the culture of the organization. I'll use their templates.” Marcel (A MA) reveals his methodology for ensuring clients will hear and accept his findings, “I'll use business terms rather than say, ‘I've got a new approach.’ I knew they weren't interested in doing social science on their population. This is all very pragmatic and results driven.”

Doctorate ethnographers Charlene and Matthew present their findings in a way that requires the clients question their paradigm. In Charlene's case, her team created an interactive CD that the client then used for training purposes. Her team's findings changed the client's methodology of teaching new hires from telling them what to do to showing employees what was expected of them. In one instance, Matthew (E PhD) presented his results in a workshop with videotaped vignettes shaped into scenarios, then gave the client the opportunity to brainstorm and construct their own findings.

To summarize, there are identifiable differences in the ways that ethnographers from non-traditional disciplines and ethnographer-anthropologists view theory and method. The most obvious area of divergence regards theory – its value and its use. Anthropologists, especially those with Ph.D.s, enthusiastically endorse the use of theory. Some go so far as to state that ethnography and theory are part of a system that feeds back on itself. This reliance on theory is stressed by the historical method of teaching ethnographic methods – dropping the anthropologist, with a belly full of theory, in the middle of “nowhere” and letting them find their way out using notepad and pencil as compass. For them, theory is the thing that allows them to go beyond the obvious observations into something other – abstraction, which, if allowed to develop via publications, would turn back into theory. Unfortunately, only a few of the anthropologists in this study had the time and freedom of data to create articles, so for many, the process is short-circuited.

For master's-level anthropologists, their reaction to theory was mixed. Some found it perplexing and of little discernable value. Others embraced it as wholeheartedly



as did the Ph.D. anthropologists. Their use of it is similarly heterogeneous. At one point, a participant denied he used theory, then later stated that it was so much a part of him, he no longer needed to talk about it.

Doctorate ethnographers' views of theory were remarkably similar to M.A. anthropologists. In some cases, taking the time to learn theory was seen as a luxury: to be used only if relevant to the audience. Only one ethnographer with a long list of publications, who did not mention theory, could realistically claim that his theoretical indoctrination resulted in an effortless application of theory. Ethnographers with a master's degree did not stress the importance of theory. It was talked about as either being osmotically assimilated and used unconsciously or in a very superficial manner.

Likewise, differences were seen in the ways that Ph.D. anthropologists thought about data collection. For them, data were a means to an end. How they gathered the data was not of importance. This, too, goes back to the lack of emphasis on methodological training that has been found in anthropology programs in years past. The focus was on the application of theory to explain what had been observed. Correspondingly, anthropologists were casual about the use of methods, including co-opting them from other disciplines.

Among the other researchers, there was also evidence of the flexible use of methods. They realized the importance of allowing for situationally influenced techniques. Although there was some discussion regarding the value of various techniques, in the end, a variety was employed.

There was not a great deal of contrast between methodologies employed by the anthropologists and non-traditional ethnographers, or between master's and doctoral degree holders. The analysis methodology of approximately half of the participants was influenced by techniques developed at the now defunct research firm, E-Lab. These methods included the "story telling," working collaboratively with colleagues, and the elastic identification of themes using post-it notes. Other analysis approaches ranged from the formal – rigorously coding data – to the informal – reading the data and waiting for "noodgy" perceptions to emerge.

Clearly, the area of biggest differentiation was the researcher's attitude toward and use of theory. For Ph.D.-level anthropologists, this was where research began and ended. Speaking broadly, no other group was even slightly as invested in theory as were the doctoral anthropologists.

Instead, the emphasis was on making sure that the deliverable met the cultural needs of the client. Practitioners had found that if they did not respect the paradigms of the employers, it became very difficult to get the client's acceptance of the findings. Once the base level expectations were satisfied, it was then possible to move on to higher order concepts. For ethnographers, the method is the thing. If, as Dourish (2006) and LeCompte and Schensul (1999a) state, the researcher is the primary instrument of praxis, how does this affect outcome as viewed by the employers? Chapter eight looks at this, and other evaluations, in detail.

## Chapter 8      Evaluation – Measuring Success

“Ethnography may well no longer be the sole province of anthropology, as Meta Baba said in her comments at EPIC. However, it is not the method that defines the insight, it is the framing and understanding of the dynamics of the systems in place, not all of which are ‘seen’ with observation alone. There are distinctive ways in which ‘ethnography’ is viewed, understood, used, and interpreted by members of the disciplines who now use it.” – Pat Sachs, a Ph.D. anthropologist, in an Anthrodesign thread

Perhaps the most important theme to be discussed in this paper is how does one measure success, which begs the more primary question, what is success? Whose success are we discussing? What are the metrics, the signposts? Further, the differences between the concept of “value added” and success can be difficult to tease apart and have a great deal of overlap. Chapter eight continues the comparison of praxis, looking at what the participants explicitly identified as their conception of success. It will also include consideration of negative aspects of doing “ethnography.” Secondly, this chapter looks at the question of succeeding or falling short from the employer and client’s point of view, including what they perceive as the differences in practitioners.

In a panel discussion held during EPIC 2006, several well-known business anthropologists considered measurements for success. Anthropologist Jeanette Blomberg suggested that the paradigm of “success” needed to be reconsidered. “The corporate world has little tolerance for ‘I don’t know, let’s go take a look’” (2006;76), which has been the starting place for anthropology and ethnography done by anthropologists. In the same session, Timothy de Wall Malefyt (anthropologist) offered that ethnography should

maintain its value by remaining malleable, offering new techniques to the client. He went on to say that “pseudo-ethnographers” found success by presenting actionable results. “Real” ethnographers must transmit theory into practice (2006). Rick Robinson (2006), with a Ph.D. in human development, rounded out the panel with the point of view of the consultant organization. For a consultancy, success was not individual, but a group experience and could be identified by the “set of values” which had come to be associated with the firm.

### **Practitioners’ Evaluation of Their Work – Positive Aspects**

When practitioners discussed their metrics for success there was no clear split along discipline or degree lines. Some had clear ideas of their measures and some found it difficult to elucidate what success looked like. Once again, the idea of “doing good” emerges. For that reason, in this section responses are not grouped by participant category, but rather by idea.

For some, like Paul (E MS) indicators remain elusive. “I’ve been struggling to identify my own versions of success all the time. To me, it’s not as simple as like ‘He seems happy’ or ‘He called me back.’ Coming up in the design tradition, that mark was usually a product ships. But I’ve been doing this for almost ten years and almost nothing has shipped. And things that do ship, it’s really hard to sort of to connect that back to what you did.” Part of his frustration was changing his internal metric from a tangible to less concrete gauge. “We were feeding something much more strategic and much more corporate decision making that then had to get implemented into the actual [thing]. If the

client feels like they got what they needed to get, I guess that's my measure of success and I don't know always how to collect that, how to determine if that's true."

Others had clear ideas about their barometer for success. Charlene (E PhD) knows that she has completed her task either by an internally generated sense of satisfaction or from the response that she gets from others regarding her work. Andrew and Sandra find tangible indicators of success. Andrew (ECA ABD) shares that when he started working for his company they had an "us and them" attitude toward international markets. He relates that after many discussions, they no longer talked about "them." Instead, as a result of his team's work, the company has expanded its team to include international research hubs. Sandra (A PhD) finds seeing a suggestion successfully implemented is gratifying. Sandra discussed a project she completed for an electronics company. The company wanted to add a feature that seemed very desirable when tested in the lab. However, when research was conducted on the street with potential users, they quickly discovered that no one wanted that ability on that type of device. Being able to make a concrete recommendation is satisfying to Sandra.

In Chapter six, both ethnographer and anthropologist participants expressed their desire to "do good" through their work. For Doug (A MS), doing good is a measure of success. His company had often observed that individual clients were promoted based on the project on which they had collaborated. "That's wonderful because one, they're successful; and two, someone that knows we helped get them promoted is now higher in the company." This philosophy carried over to the ways in which interns were treated: "Even if we don't think they're appropriate for us, we want them to go away to another

company and go, 'I learned this really cool thing when I was at X.' We want one day when the president kicks his cabinet, we want him to go, 'There's this guy I want as my press secretary and he works at X.'" He admitted, "We have lofty dreams. We want to teach people."

Marcel relates with a somewhat tongue-in-cheek attitude, "I would tell my colleagues, well, basically I'm a Marxist. It led me to say half-jokingly – but only half-jokingly – that I'm here to oppress the workers in a more empathetic and friendlier fashion. I really believe that in a large degree. Management is not set to oppress the worker, but it has an agenda. It's a corporation, a work organization, it has a purpose. The employees are really only there to serve that purpose. What can we do to make that not brutal? It doesn't have to be mean, we know that. What can I do when companies come in and say we're going to streamline our processes and change the way people do their jobs? What can I do to make that change a positive one for all sides?" Despite his cavalier delivery, it is clear his objective is to protect workers.

### The Downsides

There are less happy aspects to any job, of course, and the participants in this study have found that their work affords them plenty of opportunity to face the downsides of a career. The idea that ethnography is not easy to define was introduced in Chapter one and continued in Chapter six. That theme appears again in this section as practitioners tell of conflicts with employers who, in the researcher's mind, misunderstand or misuse data or findings. Ethical concerns were discussed in Chapter

six, however, they could also appear in this section. Misuse of data remains a very significant concern of the researchers.

Other challenges faced by researchers included situations in which the client did not understand the role of the practitioner. Franco (E MA) states, “Sometimes there is more of a constraint when there’s a work-culture mismatch. This might happen when a client might view us as a simple vendor or someone that they hired to do grunt work for them versus a thinking partner or someone to explore ideas with.”

Issues of organization and planning also affect participants. Marcel (A MA) discussed being the only anthropologist on a team with industrial psychologists and business people at an Enterprise Resource Planning firm. “It was a little marginalizing, to use an anthro term. But it was interesting too. I brought a different perspective to things. We were all trying to achieve similar goals, but in the organizational change field, there's not much consensus in how it should be done. It's very ad hoc approach.”

Paul (E MS) had an ‘interesting’ experience with a subcontract situation. He was hired by a research contractor with a virtual company who pulled teams together as he needed them. Paul related that the contractor “Got a contract and threw a bunch of us together and handed us business cards in the parking lot as we were entering the client or stakeholder for the first time. It was a bad situation, really bad. We couldn't agree on process. So I took what I had learned at that point and came to think, ‘I think I'm done.’” Paul was able to look back and find value in a bad situation, “And, you know, I think it's a great story and really interesting fieldwork and the opportunity to get to do that was really great.”

Paul was able to glean something positive out of a chaotic experience. However, it is arguably more difficult to accept that no matter how valuable their findings, it is up to the employer's discretion if they will be implemented. One of Franco's (E MA) frustrations is his inability to effect change. "I'm learning about the fragmentation of the health care system. I'm not in it trying to solve it. I'm not creating anything new that might be sold in that market. I'm making statements about it; I'm organizing observations and data about it. I'm not engaged in it." Though that has been his role as a researcher, it has become less satisfying and increasingly frustrating, until he sees no possible solution. "As much as people want to change it, it can never change. Ever since I've been working in health care, even in grad school, and projects that I've worked on, we're all talking about the same issues. Nothing is really that different. It's very slow to change and very frustrating."

In one project, Marcel (A MA) faced the distinction of having his insights rejected not once, but twice. After presenting his findings to his client regarding the negative impacts of implementing a company-wide computer project, he noted that, "My insights did help some, because I delayed them from doing something that I thought would be very harmful, not just to the people, but to the company. That company eventually did disenfranchise all those hundreds of people by putting in a large, centralized system." When he returned to do consulting work several years later, he found that conditions had deteriorated even more. "It was one of the most dysfunctional organizations I've ever seen. I spent a month interviewing and talking to people and uncovered horrendous things about what was going on there. People were scared to death for their jobs." This



information was not well received by the clients. “They threw me out. They didn't want to hear it.”

### **Others' Evaluation of Their Work**

The evaluation of employers is invaluable in trying to objectify the work that is done by those practicing “ethnography” in business. In 2007, Rigby and Bilodeau conducted a survey of 1221 international executives in Latin America, the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, the United States, and Canada for Bain & Company. Their purpose was to add to an ongoing examination of management tools, their use, and perceived value. Included were the twenty-five most popular – strategies as varied as benchmarking, corporate blogs, strategic planning, and RFIDs (radio frequency identification). In the 2007 survey, consumer ethnography was included for the first time, which is defined on the Bain & Company website as “a qualitative research technique, [which uses] a variety of methods to study behavior, attitudes, and culture to better understand what customers want and how they make their purchasing decisions.” The report continues to state that ethnography has come to be viewed by “a growing number of experts across industries as a core marketing competency and an alternative or supplement to traditional focus groups” (Bain & Company 2008).

Their findings indicated that only 35 percent of their respondents had used ethnography and the methodology had an overall satisfaction of three point six out of five, which does not sound bad until it is compared to the mean satisfaction of all the tools, which was three point seven five. This placed consumer ethnography as the third least popular tool, scoring slightly higher than Corporate Blogs and RFIDs. However, it

was more popular with Asian executives, who, from the survey results, appeared to be early adopters of techniques. Its highest satisfaction scores were from Latin American respondents and lowest from Asian executives (surprisingly). Interestingly, despite Hill and Baba's (1997) assertion that in Central America and Mexico practicing anthropology dominates anthropological practice, only 19 percent of Latin American executives had used ethnography. Ethnography was used more by companies in emerging markets (39 percent versus 32 percent usage in established market firms), but received higher satisfaction scores from established market companies (three point eight two to three point three nine). It was used slightly more in medium sized companies (38 percent. Large companies – 36 percent, small companies – 34 percent), but large companies were most satisfied with the practice. Overall, 16 percent were extremely satisfied with ethnography and 11 percent were extremely dissatisfied. However, when ethnography was applied as a major effort, satisfaction scored jumped to four point two six, while the limited effort satisfaction score dropped to three point three five (major and limited were not quantified in the available report).

Across all companies, 2 percent stated that they would no longer use ethnography while 4 percent of companies in North American and 6 percent of all Latin American firms reported they had rejected the methodology. The authors further reported that the industries reporting highest levels of usage were media and entertainment, and healthcare while the highest satisfaction scores were found in healthcare and consumer packaged goods companies. Respondents were asked if they planned to start or increase usage of the twenty-five tools. Approximately 15 percent planned to up their usage of consumer

ethnography. However, of the remaining twenty-four tools, fifteen were estimated to experience increased usage in greater than 15 percent of the firms.

What do the employers in this study say about the value of ethnography and as it is practiced by anthropologists and ethnographers? This segment explores their responses. One employer participant, Patrick (EC PhD), professor and biochemist for a national household products corporation, offers his thoughts on what he feels is the value of using ethnographic methods, “So much of what we do in... product development and R and D, you have to assume a context. Getting the context right can be the difference between having a successful product or proposition or not. You know, people say one thing and do another?... Especially when you ask them a question and they're trying to be politically correct and you can look around their house and can tell whether or not that's what they really mean.” He goes on to say that if these techniques were not available to him, in addition to neglecting the context, he feels he would miss the “richer understanding of the context behind how the person using the product, what other factors in their life might be driving the decision making.”

He also appreciates the glimpse into people's lives and the unexpected data that is the result of in-home visits. He gave the example of going into a participant's home to look at laundry practices. “Great opportunity. Go into the home, see what kind of detergents they use, what kind of softeners, what kind of equipment they have, how often they do the laundry... [The researchers] pick up ideas about ‘Here's how people are living their lives in their homes’... There're amazing little things that the average person wouldn't care about that affect decisions that can be the difference between a blockbuster

product and a ho-hum product.” Patrick represents an employer who is able to grasp the potential market value of the context-rich data available through ethnography.

Even those researchers who prefer quantitative methods have been convinced of the validity of ethnography. Lawrence, with a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology and senior researcher for a national electronics firms, talks about what he has observed within his own company, “There's been some differences of opinion or philosophy between people who are in marketing research vs. the people who are in ethnographic research kind in terms of methods - qualitative v quantitative. And do you have enough samples? and things like that. That has come up a lot. It was a lot worse a couple years ago in my opinion.” Lawrence remembered that the disagreements could become contentious. However, education by the qualitative researchers had produced a change in attitude in the market research group. They came to see that ethnography was able to produce results that were unavailable through quantitative methodologies. “I think it was clear examples of how the process worked. And actually turned into projects and initiative that were regarded as successful. It was demonstrating the value of the approach.”

#### Anthropologists' Value

The employer/client participants were asked what they saw as the positive aspects of working with an anthropologist ethnographer. The answers fell into three categories: concrete benefits, less tangible effects, and catalyst for change.

Setting reasonable expectations at the start of a project helped to educate Patrick (EC PhD) about the strengths of using ethnographic methods. “Now that I've seen the data and seen the stories, I might want to go back in and get more the next time. There

wasn't any glaring holes, 'Oh my gosh, why didn't I think of that? We're missing this big chunk.' In part, I think that's because the people we worked with had helped us upfront understand what the low-hanging fruit was, what are the limitations, what are the opportunities, and what are some of the things that we shouldn't count on." Setting the stage for the research not only ensured that the client knew what to anticipate from the data., but in this case he was pleasantly surprised by the results, "There wasn't too many surprises other than I thought they gave us more than what I was expecting."

Anthropologists were praised for their use of metaphor or models and ability to create tangible hypotheses. The ability to present data as a story that relates to another framework or theory was seen as spurring further exploration. Andrew (ABD), the employer/anthropologist, explains that anthropologists provide a holistic, comparative approach. His perceptions should be considered somewhat differently than the other employers in this section as his graduate studies created an allegiance to anthropology. His answer reflects a certain amount of bias. However, he has managed researchers other than anthropologists, and knows their work. He feels that anthropologists "provide you with grounding that is more than behavior, but at a structural level, in the loose sense of the word like culture is a structure. They look at a bigger picture and see frameworks and models. Geertz' notion of models of and models for behavior, I think is where anthropologists do well. Other people who do ethnography seldom work with models... They don't know models. They end up having a bunch of empirical stuff. I think model building is what we do well." Patrick (EC PhD) adds "That was the power that came out to me of ethnography as just not more data gathering. It was the ability to inform an

interpretation and generate hypotheses that you could then go back and test on a bigger group.”

Lawrence (EC PhD) points out that anthropologists work well on teams as the front-end researchers: “That's what they're good for. That's the model we've talked about for several years, is that we have this group of anthropologists, some of them are more sociologists, they do the very preliminary, upfront need gathering, understanding different cultures and different population, and then you can use that information and use our other people to dive into product space.” This is not an unusual use of anthropologists where they do an initial assessment, then pass the data back to the design team.

There are less tangible advantages as well. Andrew (ECA ABD) has views which, not unexpectedly given his background, mimic discussions by business anthropologists. He feels that the emic-etic perspective (seeing from the participant's as well as the researcher's point of view) of the anthropologist and relationship with participants creates a credibility for the anthropologist researcher. “I think that the difference between ethnography and anthropology is an interesting question. Another difference is we have a commitment to the people we study. [It] shows through indirectly in the presentation. So understanding the native's point of view aids us. And then understanding it from the etic perspective of what can this do to help me with design. [n.d.]... It differentiates us as people who practice ethnography pretty much across the board. And another reason that people might listen to us rather than other ethnographers.”

Andrew also feels that those who are most interested in an anthropological perspective were not engineers, whom he found resistant, but rather management because of anthropology's affinity for strategy formulation. "It's part of the shift that... when we started to look at the rest of the world and say it's not one entity, when we broke it down into culture, the engineers could care less. The people who responded to it were the middle and senior management. Particularly market strategy. It makes sense in a certain way that anthropologists would be better at that than most people because they take holist, comparative point of view for granted. The concern isn't for method, but changing the discourse. It's not the kind of thing you get from straight ethnographic research."

Wendell (EC MA) works for an international office equipment company. His responses to questions about ethnographers and anthropologists were mixed in terms of what he saw as benefits versus deficits. However, he did have a preferred researcher when given the scenario of filling an ethnographic methods researcher position. "I would be slightly biased toward the anthropologist, primarily because I think their culture is more intellectually honest, whereas ethnography still is rather young as a field. They're still struggling with what are the norms of the practice. There's a lot more individual bias in that, some for the better, some for the worse. You'll know better what you're getting with someone trained in anthropology." As will be seen later in this chapter, although he was critical of both fields, he found more value in working with anthropologists because of the consistency in practice.

The third benefit involves the anthropologist's work as a catalyst for change. In this next set of examples, change is the result of modifying perspective and challenging

assumptions, two of the hallmarks of anthropology. Lawrence (EC PhD) talks about his evaluation of the best use of an anthropologist: “I think that in the best cases where I've seen the use of an anthropologist, what makes it really successful is a combination of new insights that people wouldn't have thought of on their own. Everybody who's a product developer fancies themselves as an amateur psychologist. They sort of understand what people want and nobody's going to tell them anything new.” The implication is that anthropologists' approach is less fixed and that they remain more open to vagaries in the research environs. This aspect of the anthropologist's practice helps them to introduce new ways of perceiving situations and lead to changes in the customer/employer's paradigm.

Patrick (EC PhD) provides an example of how the use of a theoretical model provided a new framework for viewing a phenomenon. In this case, he spoke about research on individuals who had undergone a massive weight loss that he commissioned to an anthropologist. “I hadn't thought of it that way, the notion that somebody who loses eighty or 100 pounds in essence drops out of society. They reenter society as a different person. No one has ever seen them in that form... [The anthropologists] brought up this notion of it's like a tribal ritual of sending somebody off as a rite of passage almost. They need to reinvent themselves... But I thought it was really a different way of thinking about it than I would have if I'd been in the same room.” The anthropologists in this case were able to present their findings in a way that both made intrinsic sense, as it was based on a previously understood model, and shift perception of a phenomenon that the employer thought they already understood. This process of moving from data to theory



and back again to advance understanding, abduction, is well known to anthropologists, but was a new experience for Patrick.

The employers also felt that anthropological data was full of surprises that not only created new ideations, but also contested the heuristics involved in the process of change. Andrew (ECA ABD) related, “I have many times found something different than they wanted to find... Anthropology as an inductive science is really fantastic... you know Charles Peirce and abduction. It forces you to look at things in new ways. By doing that you're moving from the old to the new and constantly challenging what was involved in that transition.” Although change is a familiar constant, the approach of meta-thinking the process is reflective of anthropologists influenced by post-modern values. While business is accustomed to seeking solutions to problems and improving process and product, it is just now starting to ask higher level questions such as “What does it mean if we make this assumption?” “Why are we making this assumption?” “Is there another way to think about this situation?” These are the types of queries that anthropologists routinely ask themselves in order to problematizing the research universe. The value of this approach is that it reveals some the tacit beliefs of the researchers and others involved in a project as well as opening up new avenues of exploration.

#### Ethnographers' Value

Although ethnographers were not as frequently praised as the anthropologists were by the employers, their contributions were mentioned by Michael (ECE PhD), who unsurprisingly manages a group of ethnographers in a major electronics corporation. He recounts an event during project he managed which studied in-house technology use by a

service group. He was required to submit updates to the manager who had requested the research. “We had all these great stories... They would trot us out and show us off, ‘Look at how clever and cool we are. [Look at] what we are doing.’ At one point he said, ‘These stories are great, but I was really hoping for some numbers...’ I thought, ‘Oh sh\*\*. Okay.’” Michael’s felt his response was counter to what most anthropologists would have done, “We went in and counted some stuff... We can figure out how much time folks are spending doing this or that... We gave him a couple of instances and Whoa! Suddenly, the guy who wanted the numbers, had the numbers, and he didn’t care about them anymore. He was our biggest friend of the stories now... I was finally able to communicate with him in the language he wanted. Then that pithy thing, ‘They spend all their time talking,’ has all the credibility of the world.” Michael was able to communicate with his audience in a way that he believed anthropologists would not have done, and in doing so, he broke through the resistance that his client had to the data.

Michael also talks about the difficulty in seeing the tangible results of a study. “It’s effectively been transferred to the product division. To be honest, it’s hard to know, because these things take so long. Right now, there’s only been one tool developed.” He feels that there is a greater probability that, “What’s developed in other context is some sort of understanding that leads to recommendations. That’s a lot easier kind of deliverable.” As such, he hopes that it had ongoing ramifications, applicability, and development potential.

Additionally, Michael is able to relate how the reputation of his group has changed throughout the company. Initially they had to solicit work: “We spent a lot of

time making others aware of our thing, what our capability was, what are interests was, what it was that we could do for them. Once we started generating results, and we made a little tiny name for ourselves that we see internally, we had more folks coming to us, asking for it. 'Do some of that 'ethno' thing you do.'”

### Negative Aspects of Ethnography

With all the evidence in favor of using ethnography in business settings, why would someone choose not to use ethnographic methods? The reasons given included cost, measures of success, validity, and verifiability.

There is no debating that the use of multiple (potentially), highly trained and/or highly paid researchers and spending days or weeks at a field site, is a costly endeavor. Byron (EC PhD) shared that for some of their clients they frequently use the web and web-based surveys “rather than *in situ* types of observations... Typically, most clients we have that tend to be from the commercial world don't have the funding to bring in an all-out anthropological, ethnographic study. They tend to look at people's attitudes, the way that they are being influenced by the media or some economic means, and what the consequences are in terms of behaviors and mental outlooks at being in those types of situations.”

Wendell's (EC MA) background in psychology impels him to question whether asking evaluative questions of participants yields meaningful data: “Using what people say as data is valid. I don't think there's much validity in data when you get people talking about why they do things. If you're going through a step-by-step process talking about what's in their working memory that can be very helpful and can be used as data.

But if you're talking about higher levels about, 'What would help you in your work?' or 'Do you feel empowered?' or things like that, I don't think the data you get from those kinds of questions is particularly useful. Wendell's experience has been that anthropologists and ethnographers ask too many of those types of questions and rely too heavily on the answers. This has led him to distrust researchers' protocols and their product.

Perhaps most alarming, but unfortunately not surprising, was a statement made by Byron (EC PhD), "I'm always interested in the results, but it's hard for me as a non-anthropologist to question them in more detail other than 'How many subjects did you have?' 'What was the range?' 'How independent are the samples?' and simple scientific things that I know from my own background in physics research." In admitting that he cannot evaluate the validity of the work which his researchers produce, Byron revealed himself to be in a vulnerable position. As a director who, as he discussed later, relied on his researchers for certain types of data resulting in abstraction and generalization, his inability to assess the information he is given could impact his ability to make informed decisions. He would not be available as a mentor, could be sidestepped by another agent who understands the work, disengaged from critical processes, and become irrelevant.

Breaking down the critical comments to look specifically at anthropologists, the complaint most often cited concerned methodology. In the first case, Lawrence (EC PhD) talks about his observations of engineers' reactions to an anthropologist's less structured, on-the-fly approach to methodology. Adding to the quantitative researchers' discomfort was the tendency of anthropologists to adjust their protocol after some initial

time in the field: “There's resistance to that by people who are not trained anthropologists. They want to stick to it even if it's not working. ‘It started out this way; we've got to do it this way.’” While it is not surprising that an anthropologist’s predisposition to locate himself or herself in a somewhat fluid framework would cause discomfort to those who practice a more fixed methodology, it creates a gap that had to be bridged for the sake of successful teamwork.

Wendell (EC MA) turned his attention to anthropologists’ analysis and challenged them to produce data with predictive capabilities: “Anthropologists are not in any way channeling or identifying some underlying properties that exist, I think they’re simply documenting the inventions and conventions that individuals come up with in the course of their daily life. Those things change and they hopefully can point out when and how they are changing and why. That would be the most useful to me rather than pointing out the conventions and claiming these are underlying universal principles.” Wendell did not elaborate but based on the type of projects he has spearheaded, one could assume that he wants anthropologists to foresee the degree of success his organization will achieve in developing new technology for specific applications.

Employers also saw limitations to the way ethnographer’s practiced ethnography, even employers who worked side by side with ethnographers. Regarding the project that he managed, Michael (ECE PhD) admitted, “There was a lot I couldn't explain. I think ultimately what we have to do is combine methods. The biggest issue for a lot of folks, not that I have it, is the Instance-based work, where you poke at this instance, you poke at that instance and you try to say something general... It takes a lot of time to poke at

enough instances before people go, ‘Alright, alright already. I believe you.’” His response to the skepticism of his peers was to incorporate additional methods, to produce more data. “I think we have to be more clever, more creative about finding other ways of looking across the range of things like whatever it is that we’re looking at.”

### Perceived Differences

In an ideal world, a research project would return clear-cut results. In this real-world study, the results were more ambiguous. One of the research objectives of this project was investigating to what extent employers differentiate between ethnographers and anthropologists. What distinctions can they make? The employers were asked to identify the differences between anthropologists and non-anthropologist practitioners. It was not always possible to do so. Wendell (EC MA), who could be quite clear on the distinctions between the two groups and their shortcomings, is equivocal in his response: “In my own mind, I’m very fuzzy on the distinction between ethnography and anthropology. I think of it much more in terms of whether people are doing observation for the sake of observation or whether they’re doing observation in the service of design or product development of some sort. Oftentimes my experience, ethnographers are often very closely coupled with observation for the sake of product improvement.”

Other employers had no difficulty recognizing that differences existed, but found it more challenging to discern whether the differences were due to training or were based in the individuals’ personalities. Lawrence (EC PhD) articulates this dilemma. “[In] the specific cases I gave you, there are obvious personality differences between the anthropologist in case one and the ethnographer in case two. The anthropologist in the

first case, it's like somebody who's more curious and more enthusiastic and puts a lot of energy into the research. I think [that] is important. Maybe you can find ethnographers and human factors engineers, who have that, I'm sure you can." He went on to talk about the differences he could distinguish. "But there does seem to be that openness that I mentioned earlier that seems to be very important. It's interesting to think about to what extent the background training in anthropology is responsible for a successful researcher. There is definitely an orientation that seems to come with that but there also needs to be basic capability, ability to communicate for one thing, some curiosity for another thing. There is something about the ability to not just notice things but to interpret those things on a broader scale in a way that normal people don't seem to do."

Wendell (EC MA) is less ambivalent about the training versus personality question. "I think the differences are driven by individual differences than by training... And speaking more broadly not just from the experience of working with people, but also interacting with people in other professional domains, and also seeing the results of their work in professional papers and things like that." Furthermore, the differentiation had no bearing on their hiring decisions. "I personally don't consider the formal training, whether it's ethnography or anthropology. For us the distinctions are pretty grey."

Although a certain level of confusion exists when discussing ethnography and those who perform it, many employer participants are able to cite what differences they had observed in the praxis of the two types of practitioners. One of the larger areas of variance is methodology. When Michael (ECE PhD) showed the data that his team had collected to one of his company's anthropologists, he felt they were not impressed. "I

think there were a couple of issues here. One was the issue of the data, not so much how it was collected, but the hope that there was more data, or more global view of the data. We made a decision not to capture keystrokes or messages from people. So sometimes, we would just rely on the videotaping of people's screens. That's not fully reliable; you miss stuff... We weren't necessarily with each person we met or we worked with, although we tried to in most cases get an interview or history, kind of chat them up." He admitted that he'd like to use these other methods. "If all the data are not there, it's a little frustrating." He also sensed that the data analysis was questioned by the staff anthropologists: "Because we've generated so much data, and haven't really touched a lot of it, and because we don't come at it from a particular theoretical angle... I think our particular goal... our method of analysis wasn't in common."

Wendell (EC MA) thinks the distinctions between researchers help to create a workforce with differing types of strengths. "So, um... I'd say most of the people that we deal with who have been doing product design or research have not been formally trained in anthropology... they have a better idea of how observation is coupled with design and are much more sensitive to design issues. But the people who are trained in anthropology are much more, I think, trained in the methodologies, and have their observations somehow less biased I would say. They're not as ready to jump or be worried about how their observations tie directly to some technology or design issues."

The use of theory or the ability to abstract from the particular to a more generalizable form, to create a model based on data, these abilities have been cited throughout this chapter, usually as desirable skills (although not by Wendell). In one of



the projects that Lawrence (EC PhD) recounts, he was contracted to a media group. The group talked about themselves and their needs: “We’ve got this whole culture built up. This is our thing. And we know how to sell to people. And we want you guys to help us create a website to embody that, our whole way of selling.” Lawrence’s team felt that “an anthropologist would help to translate what we observed into higher-level principles that we could then turn into a design.” Back then, it was a daring idea to use an anthropologist, but they thought that this was the right situation to try what they thought of as an innovative approach.

In another example, Byron (EC PhD) notes that his staff anthropologist has “a nice theoretical background” and could equate what she observed in the field to models, which he attributes to her PhD. He points out that the staff M.A. ethnographer that we are discussing is more pragmatic. The ethnographer is also able to determine whether the factors involved are universal or specific to the situation under scrutiny. Byron sees the ethnographer as staying away from “highly theoretical results or schools of thought, but answering meaningful question in ways to the best of his abilities.” He notes, “It’s interesting you choose them because they really have very different approaches to the work they do, but both are highly prized by our clients.”

One of the assumptions inherent to this study is that academic degree had an affect on the practice and outcome of researchers. The data provided by the employer/clients was contradictory on this point. Byron (EC PhD), for example, who describes himself as a theoretician, felt that “At a certain level, in order to create new knowledge, you have to have a clear understanding of both conflicting ideas and some

sort of rationalization or model behind it. And that takes years of extra effort beyond a master's degree.” As he mentioned above, he felt that abstraction was in the realm of a Ph.D. researcher, while strengths of a researcher with the master degree were more pragmatic.

While Byron felt quite strongly that a doctoral degree had significant impact on the type of research and analysis that a researcher could provide, in this study, his views remain unsupported by other's comments. In fact, only Wendell (EC MA) additionally discussed degrees. For him, the issue was one of competency. As long as the researcher could demonstrate the skill necessary to get the job done, he does not care whether he or she holds a M.A. or PhD.

#### Success – The Jury Is Still Out

The statistics compiled by Rigby and Bilodeau (2007) paints a bleak picture of the satisfaction level of employers currently utilizing ethnography. Only 15 percent of those polled planned to increase their use of ethnography. It appears from the summary of the data that the greatest chance of success would be found in the employment of ethnographers by an emerging, middle-sized company in the fields of either health care or entertainment for a longer-term project. This creates a fairly narrow envelope in which ethnography can be effective. However, one of the reasons for supplementing statistics with more qualitative measures is to ferret out the deeper reasons for the responses. Luckily, we have the discussions of the participant employers to which to turn.

As so many of the employers mention, the final test of a researcher is the results they provide. Employers fall into one of two camps in their final response to

ethnography: either wildly enthusiastic or critical and suspicious. Most who had worked with anthropologists are quite happy with the deliverable or the results. However, Wendell (EC MA) is an example of an employer who has worked with both anthropologists and ethnographers from other backgrounds who is not completely satisfied with the work he has received to date.

He is quite vocal regarding his frustrations with both styles of researchers. He starts by questioning their metrics of success: “What does it mean to be successful in collecting data? And how do you measure that, package it, communicate it?” He feels that anthropologist/ethnographers see an accurate model as the goal. For him, however, success is determined by creating a dynamic model which enables his team to create the tools necessary to empower consumers to change. “That's got to be critical to their definition to success.” He uses the metaphor of a lawyer’s relationship to the law to express how he would like his ethnographic researchers to relate to the models they build: “I see the law as an attempt to write down what are the norms of behaviors that we as a society come up with to make our lives more effective. Those rules change over time as society changes over time. Seeing the law as responsive to those changes and facilitating those changes for the better is a more appropriate view than what I see as the high priest of law where the lawyers see themselves as doling out the word.”

On the other hand, Patrick (EC PhD) relates how impressed he is with the anthropologist’s ability to take raw data and turn it into a coherent story. He stresses that it is their experience in the field, in conjunction with the physical data, which allows them to form a narrative. Lawrence (EC PhD) is also complimentary toward the

anthropologists with whom he had worked. He holds that in order to share results, one must be able to communicate them effectively. In his experience, the anthropologists that he has worked with are “quite good at communicating their results and turning that into something that is actionable.”

He gives examples of two projects. In one, he worked with an anthropologist and the other, he worked with a group without an anthropology background who did ethnography: “There's a dramatic contrast in terms of the actual findings, because here in the shopping example, (which employed an anthropologist)... it was focused very much on the experience, these higher-level sociological constructs and interactions between people and things like that. The other example (with a focus-group consultancy doing ethnography) was really focused on technology and ‘this is a better technology than this one because people were more receptive to it.’ So in the second example it was basically opinions rather than analyzing use patterns or analyzing social structures.” In terms of the product, “The interpretation in the second example was very direct and in the shopping example was very indirect. I don't know to what extent that contributed to the success. Maybe the second example would have been successful in some other situation. But there seemed to be a dramatic difference in the outcomes of both of those.” In the shopping study, while the interpretation was “indirect” a website was developed, while as a result of the technology research, despite the time and energy put into the research and presentation, nothing was produced.

To be fair to ethnographers, Michael (ECE PhD) feels that the work his team does allows him to produce useful results. “Publishing papers is a fine end product for some

things because in those papers are contained insights. My papers contain insights. That's startling. It might encourage people to have insights about something... These are journal articles, not in-house papers.” He also reveals his finding in presentations, which he feels works better for an internal audience. “As a result of these studies, we've been developing tools to help system administrators. That's a direct result of this work.”

In this chapter, the contrast between anthropologists, particularly Ph.D. anthropologists, and all other researchers becomes clearer. Success remains a moving target, yet many of the participants, both employers and practitioners, are able to elucidate what they feel is the value of ethnography. According to statistical outcomes from one quantitative researcher firm, most employers have a lukewarm response to ethnography. However, when the responses of the participants are reviewed, ethnography, in general, is seen as being able to change perceptions, inform design decisions, and “do good.” Employers praised all ethnographers for the ability to provide a glimpse into everyday life, giving clients contextual data.

For an academic practitioner, the audience for the deliverable of research is, for the most part, academic peers. Because of a shared background, there is little need for translation. When, for example, one of Bourdieu's concepts is cited, most, if not all, readers will have some idea of not only the idea being presented, but also the background and context of the theory in play. Such is not the case for the non-academic practitioner. Not only does he or she need to produce credible results, but translate them into a form in alignment with the consumer's worldview. Add to that, the practitioner's awareness that, to paraphrase Burt, in academia, data is knowledge; in industry, it is a potential weapon.

Despite these barriers to success and potential pitfalls, employers find that anthropologists have many useful qualities such as setting realistic expectations for the clients, building models from the data which can be used to create testable hypotheses, keeping the research focused, offering a unique emic-etic perspective, changing perspectives, and providing findings that are valuable for constructing higher-level business strategy. Ethnographers from non-traditional backgrounds do not receive the same accolades as their anthropological colleagues. Only one employer, who functions as a hands-on manager of ethnographers, states that his team is able to generate results which lead to actionable recommendations.

As the employer sample size is quite small, generalizations are not warranted. Still, it is of note that the employer most dissatisfied with ethnography has an MA, while those who are pleased with the work of researchers, particularly anthropologists, hold PhDs. Perhaps employers who have completed the doctorate process are better able to appreciate the offerings of a doctoral-holding practitioner.

Both practitioners and employers face challenges in learning to work together. Meanwhile, practitioners still struggle with employers' misconceptions of their role, working in dysfunctional groups, and seeing their recommendations ignored. Employers respond that ethnography is expensive and that the data is difficult to evaluate for validity. Anthropologists' findings are criticized as having no predictive value. An ethnographer-employer revealed that he could not explain his data and concluded he needed better methods.

Regarding the perceived differences between the two groups, employers are not clear whether the distinctions are due to training or personality. However, they are able to determine that ethnographers are more practical and more design oriented.

Anthropologists are judged to be less biased, more open-minded, with a greater ability to make abstractions from the data. In particular, Ph.D. anthropologists were credited with the capacity to create knowledge. On the other hand, one employer was quite clear that he did not care what the training or background of the researcher was, only that they possessed the needed skills.

Ultimately, in evaluating the success of researchers, metrics remain elusive and employers' comments do not help to clarify what they consider successful. One employer reiterated his need for forecasts, while another complemented anthropologists on their skill at turning raw data into a story. Another contrasted anthropologists' analysis of patterns and social structures with the pragmatic results of ethnographers.

Looking back over this chapter, it is clear that there is a great deal that remains unspoken between researchers and employers. Perhaps this is simply the nature of the praxis. Ethnography comes from anthropology and, ultimately, anthropology is about ideas and explanations; seeking the *explanandum* and providing the *explanans*. Still, employers are drawn to the stories that anthropologists weave and show evidence that they are less satisfied when a more prosaic solution is presented. Perhaps anthropologists appeal to something lying dormant in the average businessperson's soul – the need to believe that she or he is part of something bigger than selling soap.

## Chapter 9      Conclusions – Possible Solutions

At one point during our time together, Sandra was telling me about a book she was reading by another anthropologist. “When I read this book, I’m reminded of what anthropology brings. We’re primarily a theoretical discipline. Ethnography fundamentally started out as a thick description of a culture. It wasn’t a set of methods at all. Because you can use any methods you want to get this at this ethnography, this story.” She went on to contrast that with what she had observed. “The term ethnography has been adopted by a lot of different disciplines and is used widely. People use the word ‘ethnography’ like it’s this catchy phrase that they can use now. I have seen people, in different places I’ve worked as a consultant, you walk in and they say, ‘We need an ethnographer’ and it’s nothing more than just observing some situation. That’s not ethnography, that’s observation. Or, ‘We want you to go into people’s homes and do an ethnography.’ Well, that’s just contextual inquiry; that’s not ethnography.” The air became thick with her frustration. “Ethnography is something broader than that! [But] that’s what ethnography is at this point, just some qualitative data collection strategies that then, people use in whatever way. Marketing people use it in another way.” She shook her head. I didn’t respond for several seconds. How do you respond to that?

This thesis is an attempt to qualify the work done within the domain of business by anthropologists and researchers from other fields that undertake the praxis known as ethnography. Several themes have emerged regarding praxis and practitioner including the influence of history, the problem of boundaries, classifications, definitions, and relationship to theory. The question remains, what is to be done about the contested area of ethnography? I am studying the people who do the jobs to which I aspire and so the answer affects my professional future. Perhaps this work is more incestuous than reflexive. However, before I am guilty of the postmodernist vanity that Giddens (1995) rails against, I will do as he suggests (and employers demand) and get on with it to produce something tangible.



## **Problem**

This study was spurred by the criticism that has been fired, mostly from the anthropology side of the aisle, at ethnographers with academic backgrounds and training other than anthropology. In this study, there are first-hand accounts from employers and unsubstantiated accounts from anthropologists that there is a type of practitioner known as a “bad ethnographer.” While this may be an exaggeration, there have been reports that not all ethnography is equal.

Not all anthropologists are *ipso facto* the pinnacle of ethnographic practitioners. There were claims from a participant employer and an M.A. anthropologist that Ph.D. anthropologists did not meet all needs. However, in general, employers seemed pleased with the work of doctoral-holding anthropologists, charmed by their ability to tell “stories” and articulate invisible structures. Correspondingly, employers are less happy with the work of ethnographers. When they are satisfied with the work of ethnographers, they use them for pragmatic, practical purposes, not to create abstractions.

According to a meta analysis of the literature by Feist (2006), scientists as a group have a unique personality constellation, scoring high in the areas of dominance, arrogance, hostility, self-confidence, autonomy, introversion, openness, flexibility, drive, and ambition. It is not known which came first in this chicken-egg conundrum – the personality or the practice. However, even if scientists start with higher proclivity toward these traits, it is not unreasonable to assume that their training does not mitigate them, and may magnify these attributes. Turner’s rites of passage discussion outlines how powerful the liminal period is in the formation of identity. Therefore, these traits may be

even more evident in anthropologists who go through perhaps the most identity transformative Ph.D. ritual – off-shore fieldwork (OSF). If this is true, it may help explain the vehement reaction of anthropologists to researchers co-opting their techniques.

This begs the question, are anthropologists overreacting because of their makeup? An additional stressor is the treatment that non-academic anthropologists have endured at the hands of their academic siblings. At best, they are pitied, at worst, cast out (verbally) from the discipline. The OSF ensures that they form an identity that is very closely aligned with the discipline. This ostracism could have a profound impact on their self-image as a practitioner.

Ethnography, whether practice or product, has never belonged exclusively to anthropologists. Other groups practicing ethnography include sociologists and psychologists (for example, the Hawthorne studies) – usually doctors with a grounding in a social science. Then, a little more than twenty years ago, ethnography was rediscovered as a business tool making it popular in industry and the media.

The popularity and demand for ethnographers encouraged others without the benefit of social science training to adopt what they perceived to be the techniques of the praxis. Some were mentored and others self-taught. The invisible work of ethnography went unnoticed. As the word filtered through the business anthropology community, the fear grew among anthropologist that the work, lacking a theoretical backbone, must be substandard. Both Sillitoe (2003) and participant Susan (A PhD) recount stories of confrontations with “practitioners” who felt their very short-term exposure to

ethnography (two hours to two weeks) qualified them to hang a shingle. Those who reacted did not formulate a unified response, but rather a series of complaints. They worried that their reputations were endangered.

Adam (E PhD), from an Anthrodesign post, justifies this as part of the natural evolution of a practice: “Sure ethnography has a theoretical component and was originally only a descriptive framework and did not provide design recommendations or initiate change. However, that is not the purpose to which it is now put to and the approach needs to adapt to a new environment.” He advocated the use of “discounted” (simplified) techniques to encourage more ethnography, even by those with no training.

## **Findings**

The question for this thesis remains, is there a difference between researchers and, if so, what can be done about it? The employers who had worked with both types of researchers felt there was a difference. Lawrence (EC PhD) expressed his frustrations in working with ethnographers and his satisfaction in his work with anthropologists. Byron (EC PhD) discussed how he used his Ph.D.-level anthropologist researcher differently than his master’s degree-holding ethnographer. Wendell (EC MA), although not enamored of either type of practitioner, stated he would choose an anthropologist over an ethnographer because he was more certain of the qualities he would find in that researcher.

Based on the small sample in this study, the answer to the question, “Does the background of the practitioner affect the praxis?” is yes. The greatest difference is seen not between anthropologists and ethnographers or Ph.D. practitioners and M.A.

researchers; the greatest variance was found between doctoral anthropologists and everyone else. The greatest differentiating factor is the researcher's relationship to theory.

Doctorate-holding anthropologists love theory, breathe theory, live theory. They seem imbued with it at the cellular level. This was true of every Ph.D.-level anthropologist who participated in this study: Tanya, Sandra, Lara, Jennifer, Barbara, and Beryl. Even Andrew, who had completed his fieldwork, but not his doctoral dissertation, had an appreciation for theory that was far greater than that of the other master's degree-holding anthropologist practitioners. The posts from Anthrodesign members also supported this finding.

None of the other participants came close to the level of reverence for theory of the anthropology doctors. Discussing the others in descending level of affiliation to theory, Ph.D. holders from other disciplines – Charlene, Matthew, Michael, and Burt – only briefly touched upon their use of theory. Although it may have been an unspoken part of their praxis, as in the case of Burt, it was not a focus of the discussion of their work. Among master's degree-level anthropologists, Marcel talked of the value of theory in his work and seemed to have a substantial knowledge of theories. However, Curtis wished he had a better grounding in theory, while Doug equated theory to a cooking show. Ethnographers with master's degrees professed a superficial understanding of theory and only a weak desire to learn more.

The reason for Ph.D. anthropologists' firm attachment to theory stems, almost assuredly, from their doctoral education. How this training differs from other disciplines

is left for another researcher. It is unlikely that it is solely the result of overseas fieldwork, but that experience may help to cement the learning that is already in place.

Employers in this study valued the theoretical perspective the Ph.D. anthropologists brought to the table. It should be noted that all of the employers, save Wendell, were also Ph.D. holders. This may have increased their positive reception of anthropological epistemology, especially in the case of Byron who talked about the value of abstraction and knowledge creation. Whether all employers would share their level of admiration for a well-turned theoretical construct is worth exploring for another researcher.

### **Definitions, Metrics, and Classification**

It is clear that one of the main problems facing practitioners and employers is the lack of definition for ethnographic praxis, which has led to confusion among employers and frustration for researchers. Yes, it has become a methodology, but what one can expect from it is hard to elucidate. There is no job description for ethnographers, nor could there be, as each project must be evaluated individually. Metrics for success, when they exist, are based on a negotiation between researcher and employer/client. If employers do not understand what realistic goals are, how do they know what they can appropriately ask of the practitioner? Wendell was an example of an employer who was unaware of the scope of ethnography's abilities and wanted predictive capabilities from his anthropologists. However, anthropology and anthropological methods (*ethnographie*) make no pretense of having the capacity to forecast the future, having been developed to facilitate description and explanation.

Instead of defining what ethnography is, another approach is to determine the benefits of using ethnography. Table 9.1 lists the advantages employers identified.

**Table 9.1** Employers' perceptions of the benefits of ethnography

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Changing perceptions, shifting paradigms, questioning assumptions
Making the invisible visible
Exoticizing the familiar and familiarizing the exotic
Creating models/ frameworks/ stories/ metaphor
Generating hypotheses
Proposing concrete solutions

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Wendell (EC MA) maintained it is increasingly important that measures of success be established. How does one define, compare, and measure those behaviors? Would one measure the number of perceptions altered? Perhaps quantify how hidden had been the discovered informal power structure? Someone may devise a metric for success, but it seems unlikely.

Ethnographers and anthropologists have different foci. Ethnographers want to provide something useful to the employer. Educating or changing client perceptions are added benefits. Anthropologists want to educate employers; providing something of further use to the client is a satisfying side effect. Obviously, both cases are an exaggeration, but anthropologists' history is one of informing their (typically) readers, adding to the body of knowledge, and helping to form opinions. Ethnographers mainly come from disciplines and backgrounds that are results driven, such as design, marketing, engineering, and so forth. Given what each group is attempting to accomplish, perhaps it is unfair to attempt to judge them by the same metric. So, to muddy the waters even further, if yardsticks are necessary, then two should be created.

It has been suggested that some type of regulatory system be implemented, either formal or informal. The problem remains that without definition, there can be no classification (Bowker and Star 1999). Classificatory systems rely on comparability – regularity of semantics and objects, consistency; visibility – making invisible work visible – to a reasonable extent; and control – how much choice the practitioner has.

Artificially manipulating any one of the three areas necessary to achieve a classifiable practice is problematic. Ethnography is contextual. As practitioners discussed in Chapter seven, methodology is predicated on the project. Proposing a rubric to determine the suitable use of theory is ludicrous. As an example of the challenge of creating consensus regarding praxis, the difficulties the AAA experienced in forming a code of ethics is indicative of how well anthropologists accept regimentation. Additionally, as many of the employers mentioned, they like the ingenuity employed by ethnographers. Ethnography is a hand-made craft, not a factory product. Another issue is the contingencies of practice (Bowker and Star 1999) prevalent in ethnography. Because participant observation is a dominant method in ethnographic work, the researcher must be ready to change directions with no notice, depending on the situation at hand. It is not predictable or schedulable. Ethnography is jazz, thriving on improvisation, not classical music.

Correspondingly, according to Beryl (A PhD), standards should be ever morphing, not static: “I think if you have a business, I consider my practice is a business, I can't stand still. If I was doing the same thing as in 1984, I wouldn't have clients... What I do now looks nothing like when I started... It's through learning what clients

value... Clients want things fast, so you have to figure how to do things quicker to get information than traditional methods.” Much like the misconception that sharks must continually swim or suffocate, she suggests that unless a practitioner evolves, his or her practice will die.

The creation of a new or utilization of an existing professional organization could address many of the issues including training and certification. As Dawson (2008) and Sillitoe (2003) suggested, an organization separate from the AAA could foster professional support. As an example, Dawson mentions the American Board of Forensic Anthropology, which is not affiliated with AAA, offers professional certification. Beryl (A PhD) states, “We need help from the discipline's organized parts to explain why we’re different from thousand of people who call themselves ethnographers. Legitimize and validate what we do as members of a profession. Practitioners need a profession and a profession behind them.”

This solution, seemingly elegant, is met with resistance. Ramon, a Ph.D. anthropologist and consultant, posted an email to the Anthrodesign list serve stating that he believed professionalization would hurt the praxis. “I think we are spending too much time trying to 'professionalize' (anti-craft) for trading purposes, and in doing so lose the soul/vitality/innovativeness of the intersection. I'm a big believer that we are all designers, and that we are all anthropologists. From childhood!”

Communities of practice could provide the ad hoc training to improve not only non-anthropologist ethnographers’ skills, but anthropologists’ as well. These could be local practitioner organizations or virtual groups such as Anthrodesign. The informal



learning that occurs in such venues is valuable, but using Anthrodesign as an illustration, the knowledge exchange tends to be rather focused and at an advanced level. It would be difficult to sharpen rudimentary abilities through the emails distributed or the occasional face-to-face event.

McCracken (2006a) suggests attrition by publication, bringing publish or perish to the business sector: “The publishing gives legitimacy that you know what you're talking about.” Sillitoe (2003) echoes his idea, adding that publications by practitioners increase relevancy. However, Pink (2006) points out that anthropologists working outside the bounds of academia have little incentive to publish, as their jobs typically do not include a tacit “publish or perish” clause. In addition, the compulsion to sign confidentiality agreements may preclude any data being allowed out of house.

The answer for Wendell (EC MA) is not curricula modifications, internships, certification, or mentoring, but rather, to bypass the system, growing researchers in-house. Wendell expresses a desire to fashion a researcher with solid ethnographic training, but not necessarily affiliation with any academic field. He is trying to avoid researchers who are “steeped in the traditions of creating models for their own sake” and are committed to “doing this say science of design rather than the science of ethnography or the science of anthropology.”

### **Suggestions**

Giddens (1995) asks if anthropologists are still relevant. Further refining his question, are anthropologists relevant to business? In an age where postmodernism has made everyone capable of knowledge production (Giddens 1995), is there a place for the

academically trained practitioner? Both Giddens and the employers in this study conclude that the answer is yes. Giddens points out that although anyone can tackle an intellectual conundrum, academic professionals approach a research subject in a rigorous and fluidly formalized manner. The resulting theories and findings add to the body of knowledge that contributes to future research. Employers, too, see the value of including theory as a way of expanding the scope of project results.

This does not mean, as was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that praxis or practitioner has reached the apex of the bell curve of value to employers. Evolution, as Beryl noted, is critical. Employers and researchers both recognized that practitioners have areas in which they can make improvements. Baba (1986), Sherry (1986a), and Tway (1977) all agreed that additional training is required for anthropologists interested in a business practice. This would hold true for ethnographers as well. Participants Doug (A MS) and Franco (E MA) stressed the need for multidisciplinary researchers. In Doug's case, employment at his company depended on it. Further, he warned that companies with a singularly anthropological approach cannot compete. Franco discussed creating the elusive interdisciplinary ethnographer in house. Doug felt that multidisciplinary backgrounds and interdisciplinary teams help researchers find the "so what?" required by clients and employers. Byron (EC PhD) added that communication skills, including the ability to read an audience and to self-correct were the most important skills that any of his researchers could possess. Wendell (E MA) wanted greater assurance that the stories that his researchers presented were representative, that they could be generalized, and that they were reliable.

Another difficulty is some researchers' ambivalence about working for business, working whole-heartedly to increase market share or profits, fueled by their enduring distrust of capitalism. Marietta Baba, with a long history of working for industry, cautioned anthropologists working in the business world (Walsh, 2001). She suggested that, in some cases, anthropologists could be violating the code of ethics which advocates that no harm come from research. This condition may be breached by research that assists companies in marketing products that are economically disadvantageous to the consumer. Agar (1996:23) stated, "It seems to me that ethnographers usually come to the same conclusion. Capitalism – especially 'transnational capitalism' – is evil, period." He went on to refute this assumption in light of his experiences working in then communist Czechoslovakia and mediating a partnership between Mexican and American companies. Both Doug (A MS) and Franco (E MA) raised the issue of contributing to capitalism and both made peace with that reality. As Doug said, "It's important to realize that the work that we do closes mom-and-pop businesses. It's the reality of higher American business economics. If you're not here to inspire, you're in my way."

## **Conclusions**

Ethnography, as with any business tool, will remain in use as long as employers and clients find that it can contribute in some measure to profitability. Unfortunately, what that measure might be, what an employer/client can expect from an anthropologist or an ethnographer, is not clear. Definitions remain problematic and metrics for success are elusive. Even solutions to help rectify the ambiguity of the situation are difficult to identify and practitioners remain skeptical of those proposed to date. However, it seems

the only options for researchers concerned about the overall quality of work produced are either to accept that ethnographers will continue to work without guidelines or practitioners must come together long enough to develop some type of certification process or gate-keeping procedure. Until some type of accord is reached, perhaps someone could create a pamphlet for employers, “Your Ethnographer and You: What to Expect When You’re Expecting Results.” The flippancy of such an approach expresses the frustration inherent in circumstances in which there is no right and no wrong because there no standards, no benchmarks, to which to compare praxis. As difficult and as painful as it may be to reach consensus, if practitioners want to achieve some degree of rigor to safeguard their professional reputation and ensure future work, a guidebook to negotiate the culture of ethnography must be created.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I

#### THEORY AND PRACTICE PROJECT: INSTRUMENT – Employer/Client

I'd like to discuss your experience when employing ethnographers and/or anthropologists. In this project, ethnographer refers to researchers employing methods such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation to collect data without a formal anthropology background.

Have you had experience with ethnographers and anthropologists?

Can you tell me about a project where you used an ethnographer or an anthropologist?

*Probes:*        Why did you choose an ethnographer/anthropologist?  
                     How did you hope to use their findings?  
                     How did they present their findings to you?  
                     What did you hope they would achieve? Were they successful?

What other types of qualitative researcher have you used?

If you've used both an anthropologist and an ethnographer, can you discuss how they each approached the project?

How did each approach the findings?

What did using an anthropologist/ethnographer add to the project?

What did need that you could not get from the anthropologist/ethnographer?

Would you use an ethnographer/anthropologist again?

Is there anything you'd like to add that I didn't ask?

## Appendix II

### THEORY AND PRACTICE PROJECT: INSTRUMENT – Ethnographer

I'd like to discuss your job and the work that you do as a researcher. To start, I'd like to get some basic data about your job so that I can understand your position and the company for which you work.

#### Basic Data

Could you tell me your title?

*Probes:* Describe your position for me?  
Could I have one of your business cards? A CV or resume?

Describe your academic background.

*Probes:* Where did you go to school?  
What was your thesis topic? Your dissertation?  
Who was most influential in inspiring your work?  
What's your theoretical lineage? Was there a particular theoretical focus to your education?

Could you tell me about your work history?

*Probes:* How did you become involved in ethnography?  
What other careers did you seriously consider?  
Who influenced your decision to practice ethnography?

Could you explain the job you have now?

Could you explain the structure of your company regarding the research department?

*Probes:* Who are your clients?  
Who are your customers/employers?  
How do you find/describe a research project?  
Who determines methods? Goals? Deliverables?

Now I'd like to talk with you more specifically about your work.

#### The Work

Could you tell me about your office?

*Probes:* Describe the items, why they're here, and what you use them for.

Could you tell me about a time when you designed a project?

*Probes:* What did you want to accomplish?  
How did you choose your methodology/protocol?  
What other methods did you consider?  
Why did you choose this method and what did it give you?  
What aspects could you control?

What was out of your hands?

Could you tell me about the process of collecting your data in this particular project?

*Probes:*       What were your goals?  
                  What did you need to consider?  
                  What were the constraints?

Could you walk me through the process of analysis for a recent project?

*Probes:*       What did you have to consider?  
                  How did you make your decisions about the analysis?  
                  Tell me about any disputes

How do you write your findings?

*Probes:*       What do you have to consider?  
                  What formats or structures do you use? To what degree do you have a  
                  choice? By whom is it mandated?

What constraints does your job place on your research?

*Probes:*       How does that affect your final product?

May I have a copy of one of your reports? No identifying data will be used.

How would you describe ethnography?

What is the difference between this work when it's done by anthropologists and when it's done by other types of ethnographers?

I'd like to ask you some question about the scenario we just discusses.

Evaluations

What's the most important tool you have in your work toolbox?

*Probes:*       What skill, item, technology is most important to allow you to do your job well?

What are the most satisfying aspects of your job?

*Probes:*       What's a success?

What are the unsatisfying features?

What is your value added?

*Probes:*       What do your clients/employers say you contribute?

To what field do you think you contribute?

*Probes:*       How?